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MEDITERRANEAN CITY - TO - CITY MIGRATION

GOING THE (SOCIAL) DISTANCE

How migrant and refugee-sensitive urban COVID-19 responses
contribute to the realization of the Global Compacts
for Migration and Refugees



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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The COVID-19 pandemic spreading across the globe is a harsh reminder that global challenges do not stop at national borders. While the pandemic affects societies worldwide, refugees and migrants in situations of mobility and protracted displacement most direly feel the negative impacts. What is then to become of the central objective of “leaving no one behind” enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees in times of COVID-19?

The pandemic has drastically demonstrated that the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are indeed indispensable for realizing the objectives of these Global Compacts. Notwithstanding the already existing acknowledgement in both UN Compacts as well as in the Marrakesh Mayors Declaration adopted by cities in 2018, the pandemic underscores the urgency of actual and effective cooperation between local, national and international stakeholders.

In partnership with the cities of its network, the MC2CM project therefore launched the initiative “MC2CM support to City Response to COVID-19 Outbreak” in order to assist local authorities in the responsibility they undertake towards safeguarding their communities, of which migrants are an integral part. The initiative builds on local realities on the ground to offer policy guidelines, highlight promising practices and develop recommendations and concrete actions for emergency and recovery responses during and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the framework of the initiative, this policy paper has been developed in order to explore municipal COVID-19 crisis management and recovery responses sensitive to the needs and contributions of migrants and refugees in some Mediterranean cities. To ensure that local realities are taken into account and that local actions have a global impact, the findings of this policy paper are based on an online survey as well as expert interviews with mayors, counsellors, representatives or public administrators of MC2CM network cities in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East conducted from August to September 2020. The policy paper further draws on the results of the special session on migration, which has been organized in collaboration with the MC2CM project as part of the Live Learning Experiences (LLE) #BeyondTheOutbreak series.

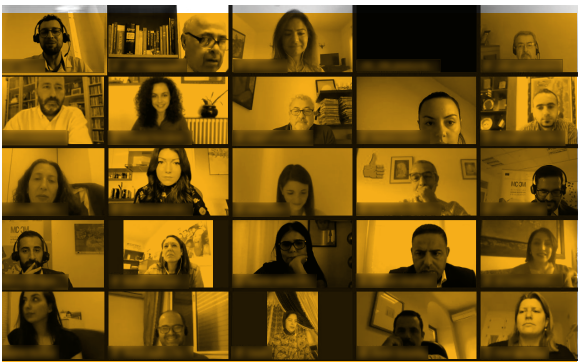
The study shows that despite the acute pressure cities are experiencing and will continue to experience, many local authorities proactively push inclusive strategies for host communities, migrants and refugees in line with central goals of the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.

ABOUT THE LIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE
#BEYONDTHEOUTBREAK

- The Live Learning Experiences #BeyondTheOutbreak series was launched in March 2020, following the global COVID-19 outbreak, by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat as a platform for local and regional governments, academic experts and organisations to exchange ideas, resources, and knowledge to respond to the immediate needs of urban citizens and to re-imagine and build back better cities after the crisis.
- The LLE series comprised 17 sessions covering the different areas in which local and regional governments work to guarantee the safety and well-being of all citizens, during the crisis and in its aftermath. The special session on migration in this context, which was held on 16 April 2020 and provided the initial impetus for the development of this study, addressed the relevance of inclusive responses to the pandemic and convened local governments from the Euro-Mediterranean region and beyond, who shared their aspirations for the future.
- The [Live Learning Experience Knowledge Hub](#), aggregating under one online platform the main ideas and resources that were shared by hundreds of participants over the 17 sessions, offers the possibility to revisit the varied thematic areas and learn more about the urban challenges, needs and responses regarding the COVID-19 crisis. Based on the LLE #BeyondTheOutbreak, UCLG further, with the support of the Diputació de Barcelona, organised a [Massive Online Open Course](#) (MOOC), which provides a global vision of the new challenges arising post COVID-19 and keys for advancing local policies, which can be used to build the foundations for a future characterized by dialogue between communities.



UCLG LIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE KNOWLEDGE HUB



ABOUT THE MC2CM PROJECT

Migration is a defining feature of urbanisation. Cities are places where people come together to live, work and find opportunities. It is also in the city where the reality of social and economic accommodation of newcomers and their interaction with host community takes place.

In this context, the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration project (MC2CM) contributes to improved rights-based migration governance in cities. Through dialogue, knowledge and action, MC2CM anchors migration governance to a process of urban planning, promoting a realistic and fair narrative on migration.



DIALOGUE

Nurturing dialogue between cities and relevant stakeholders through peer-to-peer learning and exchanges



KNOWLEDGE

Supporting knowledge generation and development of evidence-based approaches






ACTION

Providing sustainable solutions and testing tools to address migration-related challenges and opportunities

Developed in the framework of the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM), MC2CM is anchored in a network of Euro-Mediterranean cities. It is funded by the European Union and co-financed by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and is implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

More information at:

-  icmpd.org/mc2cm
-  urban_migration
-  MC2CM

I. INTRODUCTION

“As we respond to the pandemic and work towards recovery, we look to our cities as hubs of community, human innovation and ingenuity” ANTÓNIO GUTERRES¹

The COVID-19 pandemic spreading across the globe is a harsh reminder that “humanity’s problems do not stop at borders.”² While all societies are vulnerable to the pandemic, the negative impact of COVID-19 and the threat of the health crisis transforming into “a hunger crisis, a homelessness crisis and an education crisis,”³ manifests strongest in socio-economically disadvantaged populations along pre-existing lines of inequality. With migration and urbanization among the defining megatrends of the 21st century, cities have become centers of attraction for migrants and refugees⁴ seeking to build economic and social livelihoods as part of their new communities.⁵ However, urbanity is also where inequalities manifest most strongly. Cities around the world are therefore working at the frontlines of combatting this global health crisis along with its economic and social effects.

Apart from strained health systems, many cities witnessed the effects of temporary border closures that left a high number of migrants and refugees stranded, struggling to access shelter and basic services and at times facing stigmatization and racism. In addition, economic lockdowns hit populations working in low-income jobs and the informal economy disproportionately. Many of these workers have a migrant or refugee background. However, the pandemic has also led to an increased awareness for the important social and economic contributions of migrants and refugees – working in jobs of systemic importance to uphold the economic system, developing and supporting multi-lingual information campaigns to keep the population safe and cooperating with local authorities and civil society to ensure outreach and support for the most vulnerable populations. What is then to become of the central objective of “leaving no one behind” enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Compacts for Migration and Refugees in times of COVID-19?

The pandemic has drastically demonstrated that whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are indeed crucial for realizing the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Notwithstanding the already existing acknowledgement in both UN Compacts as well as in the Marrakesh Mayors Declaration adopted by cities in 2018, the pandemic raises the urgency of actual and effective cooperation between local, national and international stakeholders. While the global crisis shows the negative consequences of collaboration gaps, unilateral action and exclusionary decision-making, the pressure to find inclusive solutions results also in ad hoc strategies, demonstrating the high potential and benefits that partnerships between migrants and refugees residents, national residents, local and national authorities, civil society, academia, the private sector and international organizations can yield.

This policy paper explores municipal COVID-19 crisis management and recovery responses sensitive to the needs and contributions of migrants and refugees in some Mediterranean cities. It shows that despite the acute pressure cities are experiencing and will continue to experience, many local authorities proactively push inclusive strategies for host communities, migrants and refugees in line with central goals of the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.⁶

COVID-19 EXACERBATES PRE-EXISTING CHALLENGES

For some time now, local authorities have been calling upon national governments and international organizations to collaborate as equal partners in the realization of the GCM and the GCR, moving away from the top-down implementation approach hitherto taken as the predominant modus operandi.⁷ While many nations have reacted with unilateral rather than multilateral strategies to the COVID-19 crisis, both challenging and putting a strain on international solidarity and responsibility sharing, essential for the GCM and GCR, a growing number of local authorities all over the world are developing local and transnational cooperation with a wide range of actors to ensure that no migrant or refugee is left behind in response and recovery efforts.

Through UCLG’s “Live Learning Experience” and the adoption of the “Decalogue for the post COVID-19 era” at the launch of the C40 “Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force” and the Mayors Migration Council’s “Inclusive COVID-19 recovery for all” strategy, city leaders and representatives of local authorities have emphasized their continued commitment and political will to transform the objectives of the GCM and GCR into real-world impact in their cities and towns.

The challenges they are facing are immense. Overall, measures taken to contain further spread of the pandemic are estimated to be more severe in impact than the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008.⁸ Lockdowns, necessary to protect public health, have resulted in job losses, a decrease in remittances as well as wage theft for many workers.⁹ Since women and youth are more likely to work in industries hit disproportionately by the crisis, such as tourism, gastronomy and hospitality, they are most at risk of poverty resulting from livelihood loss.¹⁰ Many migrants and refugees are also negatively affected in this time of economic uncertainty, as they are equally overrepresented in these sectors. In addition, many of these sectors entail a higher risk of infection. The absence of safety nets for those employed in the informal economy, working under temporary contracts or living in precarious circumstances adds another layer of insecurity.¹¹

¹ Guterres, António (2020): Launch of policy brief on COVID-19 and cities.

COVID-19 in an Urban World. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/COVID-19-urban-world>

² Egeland, Jan (2020): The little talked about effects of COVID-19.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/9/25/the-little-talked-about-side-effects-of-COVID-19/>

³ ibid

⁴ Most policies at the national and international level differentiate strictly between migrants and refugees, attaching different rights and obligations to persons holding one status or another. For municipal authorities, however, this distinction often carries less importance than the question of residence, which focuses on social and economic participation of the whole population living in a municipal territory. This perspective has become even more important in times of combatting COVID-19, where crisis management must be inclusive to lead to success. Therefore, this policy paper refers broadly to “migrants and refugees”.

⁵ UN DESA (2019): World Urbanization Prospects 2018. Highlights. <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Highlights.pdf>

⁶ For a broader analysis of COVID-19 and the GCR and GCM see the two reports commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council: Easton-Calabria, Evan (2020): A restriction of responsibility-sharing: Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the Global Compact on Refugees.

https://drc.ngo/media/zjtmd3cr/exploring-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-the-global-compact-on-refugees_05102020.pdf as well as Bingham, John (2020): COVID-19 and the Global Compact for Migration: Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crisis? <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/COVID-19-and-the-global-compact-for-migration/>

⁷ See for example the Marrakesh Declaration adopted on the occasion of the 5th Global Mayoral Forum on Migration and Development in Marrakesh in 2018.

⁸ OECD (2020). OECD Employment Outlook. <http://www.oecd.org/employment-outlook/2020/#:~:text=Unemployment%20is%20project-ed%20to%20reach,not%20expected%20until%20after%202021>

⁹ ILO (2020). Social Protection Spotlight: Social protection for migrant workers: A necessary response to the COVID-19 crisis. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_748979.pdf

¹⁰ OECD (2020). OECD Employment Outlook. <http://www.oecd.org/employment-outlook/2020/#:~:text=Unemployment%20is%20project-ed%20to%20reach,not%20expected%20until%20after%202021>

¹¹ Janke, Carsten and Bauer, Joseph (2020): Geflüchtete fürchten um ihre Jobs. <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/gefluechtete-fuerchten-um-ihre-jobs.html> and Subramaniam, Guna (2020): Losing More Than Their Health – COVID-19 and Migrant Worker Wage Theft. <https://www.ihrb.org/focus-areas/migrant-workers/COVID19-migrant-workers-wagetheft> and CGAP (2020): Relief for Informal Workers: Falling through the Cracks in COVID-19. <https://www.cgap.org/research/publication/relief-informal-workers-falling-through-cracks-COVID-19>

In a global context of rapid urbanization, cities around the world are facing increasing housing shortages, which is another challenge greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. In many cities, vulnerable populations live in overcrowded conditions, and loss of livelihoods is often followed by difficulties to pay rent or even evictions.¹² In addition, mass accommodation for migrant workers as well as refugees and asylum seekers make it impossible to self-isolate and to implement social distancing measures. Many persons have faced isolation as reception centers were quarantined altogether, depriving inhabitants from access to municipal and national services.¹³

The World Bank estimates that for the first time since 1998, global poverty rates will go up as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the oil price drop, erasing most of the progress made in poverty reduction during the last five years. Compared to 2019, 40 to 60 million people are expected to fall into extreme poverty in 2020.¹⁴ This effect is not restricted to persons living in places of conflict or hit by natural catastrophes, such as droughts or plagues, but has become a more widespread threat as the repercussions of the pandemic unfold.¹⁵ Thus, shelter and food provision as well as livelihood protection become even more crucial for cities' action plans. These need to take into account a wide range of pandemic-exacerbated challenges: Child labor, also fueled by school closures, gender-based and domestic violence and human trafficking are just some of the challenges that have increased as an outcome of poverty stemming from the pandemic.¹⁶

Last but not least, cities need to counteract a rise of hate speech as well as the growing spread of disinformation in times of COVID-19, where migrants and refugees are repeatedly scapegoated and confronted with racism, including institutional racism.¹⁷ Local authorities around the globe aim to tackle risks of racism and exclusion head on by including migrants and refugees into crisis management and recovery and developing evidence-based communication strategies.¹⁸ Trust among populations and between residents and authorities is indeed key in overcoming the health crisis and its economic and social effects. As governments of proximity, municipal actors are in a central position to mitigate negative consequences and work towards resilience and recovery by placing the most vulnerable persons at the center of equitable solutions.¹⁹

¹²Gorevan, Daniel (2020): Downward Spiral: the economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees and displaced people. Norwegian Refugee Council. https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/nrc_downward-spiral_COVID-19_report.pdf

¹³ Betts, Alexander; Easton-Calabria, Evan; Pincock, Kate (2020): Refugee-led responses in the fight against COVID-19: building lasting participatory models. <https://www.fmreview.org/issue64/betts-eastoncalabria-pincock>

¹⁴ World Bank (2020): Poverty Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>

¹⁵ Egeland (2020): The little talked about effects of COVID-19. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/9/25/the-little-talked-about-side-effects-of-COVID-19/>

¹⁶ CFR (2020): The Evolution of Human Trafficking During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/evolution-human-trafficking-during-COVID-19-pandemic> and ILO (2020): COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/flagships/ipec-plus/WCMS_745287/lang-en/index.htm and UNDP (2020): Gender-based violence and COVID-19. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-COVID-19.html>

¹⁷ UN News (2020): Interview with Gary Rynhart: Uncertain future for migrant workers, in a post-pandemic world. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072562> and Bornman, Jan (2020). Xenophobia turns migrants into scapegoats. <https://www.newframe.com/xenophobia-turns-migrants-into-scapegoats/>

¹⁸ Garcetti, Eric; Aki-Sawyerr, Yvonne and Covas, Bruno (2020): Migrants and refugees are being forgotten in the COVID-19 response. This has to change. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/refugees-migrants-COVID-coronavirus-not-leave-behind/> and OHCHR (2020): COVID-19 does not discriminate; nor should our response. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25730&LangID=E>

¹⁹ Clüver-Ashbrook, Cathryn (2020): Cities as changemakers. How can we tackle global challenges at the local level. Progressive Digital Summit 2020. June 2020.

In order to offer city representatives a virtual space to exchange ideas and leverage their collective power for finding innovative solutions, UCLG created the “[Live Learning Experience Knowledge Hub](https://www.beyondtheoutbreak.uclg.org/migration)” in the spring of 2020. A special session on migration held in this forum, in collaboration with the MC2CM project, provided the initial impetus, which then inspired the development of this study.²⁰ The findings of this policy paper are based on an online survey as well as expert interviews among the member cities of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM) in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East conducted from August to September 2020.²¹ While the survey demonstrates that many cities adopted innovative strategies to address vulnerabilities of migrant and refugee communities through inclusive action, expert interviews with city representatives highlight the central role that migrants and refugees play in local crisis management and the importance local authorities accord to whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches. Drawing additionally on a wide range of reports and studies developed by international organizations and city networks, this policy paper analyses how local authorities advance central objectives of the GCM and GCR in a time when inclusive multi-stakeholder and multi-level solutions are more vital than ever.

²⁰ UCLG (2020): The Live Learning Experience Knowledge Hub. Migration Session. <https://www.beyondtheoutbreak.uclg.org/migration>

²¹ City representatives from ‘Fondo Andaluz de Municipios para la Solidaridad Internacional’ (FAMSI), Irbid, Oujda, Ramallah, Rabat, Sousse and Vienna participated in the survey. Expert interviews were carried out with city representatives from Dortmund, Irbid, Oujda, Rabat, Sfax, Sousse, Turin and Vienna.

II. HOW DO CITIES TRANSLATE THE GLOBAL COMPACTS FOR MIGRATION AND REFUGEES INTO ACTION THROUGH CRISIS RESPONSE AND RECOVERY EFFORTS?

It is impossible to dispute the negative consequences of the pandemic on public health in the short term and socio-economic development and the availability of resources/funding in the medium to long term. All this will affect the capacity of local authorities to provide better futures for migrants, refugees and local communities. Nevertheless, collaborative action in crisis management and recovery planning has also led to innovative solutions.²² It has revealed the need for giving cities the capacities, legal competencies and funding to act and has demonstrated the benefits of an “inclusive and resourceful multilateralism in which communities have a say.”²³ Local and transnational solutions to reduce inequalities, provide inclusive services, strengthen social cohesion, foster green growth and fight misinformation and discrimination can become essential building blocks in a GCM and GCR implementation striving to build back better.²⁴

Which objectives of the GCR and GCM do cities advance in their crisis response and recovery efforts?

1. Promoting migrant and refugee-sensitive crisis response and recovery strategies

GCM Objective 7: Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration

GCR Paragraph 37: Support local authorities in hosting refugees and asylum-seekers

2. Ensuring safe access to services for all

GCM Objective 15: Provide access to basic services for migrants

GCR Paragraph 66, 72 – 73, 78, 80:

Meet refugees’ needs and support communities; facilitate access by refugees and host communities to quality health care; appropriate accommodation; sufficient, safe and nutritious food

3. Leveraging contributions of migrants and refugees for inclusive societies

GCM Objective 16: Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion

GCM Objective 18: Invest in skills development

and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences

GCR Paragraph 40: Leverage contributions of refugee-led organizations

GCR Paragraph 70-71: Promote economic opportunities, decent work and job creation

4. Countering misinformation and communicating inclusive narratives

GCM Objective 17: Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration

GCR Paragraph 84: Foster good relations and peaceful coexistence

5. Building back better through equal partnerships

GCM Objective 19: Create conditions for migrants and diaspora to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries

GCM Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration

GCR Paragraph 37 and 38: Engage local authorities in local and global multi-stakeholder and partnership approaches

1. PROMOTING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE-SENSITIVE CRISIS RESPONSE AND RECOVERY STRATEGIES

- **GCM Objective 7:** Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration
- **GCR Paragraph 37:** Support local authorities in hosting refugees and asylum-seekers

Goal 7 of the GCM clearly states the need to take “migrant populations into account in crisis preparedness, emergency response and post-crisis action.”²⁵ Signatory states recognize the role of local authorities in identifying and assisting migrants in situations of vulnerability and emphasize the importance of upholding migrants’ human rights, protecting the best interest of the child, adopting gender-responsive policies and practice and addressing workplace-related vulnerabilities including in the informal economy. Similarly, paragraph 37 of the GCR underlines the essential role of local authorities and other local actors as first responders in refugee situations and calls for supporting local actors in hosting displaced populations.

Appropriate reception and hosting are indeed key in the context of the COVID-19 crisis to ensure that hygiene and quarantine measures as well as social distancing can be upheld. However, migrants and refugees are disproportionately affected by border closures and curfews and many remain stranded without the ability to reach places of safety and without access to accommodation or basic services.²⁶

TAKING MIGRANT POPULATIONS AND REFUGEES INTO ACCOUNT IN CRISIS PREPAREDNESS, EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND POST-CRISIS ACTION

“As we confront COVID-19, the last thing we should do is shut out immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. To the contrary, these extraordinary individuals fill vital roles in our societies — as essential workers in our hospitals, public transit systems, manufacturing facilities, grocery stores, and more. We know true recovery from the catastrophic economic and health damage of COVID-19 will only occur when the needs of every member of society are met, regardless of legal status.”²⁷

IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Both the GCM and GCR highlight that data is key for evidence-based policies and effective action to protect and assist migrants and refugees (GCM objective 1, GCR paragraphs 45–48). Over the last years, cities have repeatedly called upon national and international actors to cooperate in improving local databases, assessing the presence of vulnerable populations including migrants and refugees as well as creating overviews of actors engaged in migration and refugee responses. The COVID-19 crisis has rendered the need for accurate information on city residents’ presence, vulnerabilities and needs even more urgent. In cooperation with civil society and in particular with migrant and refugee-led organizations as well as international partners, **cities have launched different strategies to create evidence-based crisis responses.**

²² Guterres, António (2020): COVID-19 in an Urban World. UN Policy Brief. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_COVID_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

²³ Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments (2020): Joint Statement to the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development of the organized constituency of Local and Regional Governments. https://www.global-taskforce.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/gtf_statement_hlp_2020_listen2cities.pdf

²⁴ UCLG (2020): Decalogue for the post COVID-19 era. An opportunity to take responsibility toward future generations. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/decalogue_for_the_post_COVID-19_era.pdf

²⁵ United Nations (2018): Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195

²⁶ IOM (2020): COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #26: Stranded migrants. Understanding the migration & mobility implications of COVID-19. https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19_analytical_snapshot_26_-_stranded_migrants_0.pdf

²⁷ Garcetti, Eric; Aki-Sawyer, Yvonne; Covas, Bruno (2020): Migrants and refugees are being forgotten in the COVID-19 response. This has to change. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/refugees-migrants-COVID-coronavirus-not-leave-behind>

In spring 2020, the City of [Sfax](#) reached out to IOM and “Terre d’Asile Tunisie” to coordinate support for vulnerable populations. While the municipality, prior to the crisis, had been aware of the fact that a high number of migrants were living and working in informal environments, the joint crisis response allowed the officials to correct the assumed number from 1,000 – 1,500 individuals to 5,000 – 7,000, who were in need of assistance in the urban and peri-urban areas. Building on this new evidence base, the municipality did not only manage to come to a more realistic estimation of short-term needs but is also planning to use this information for mid to long-term recovery efforts. An initial assessment of data gathered shows that the population living in informal conditions come from a more diverse geographic background than expected and that at least 50% are women and girls. This newly acquired knowledge will prove essential for the city in tailoring gender-sensitive support and upholding the rights of children in crisis management and recovery efforts.

Similar to the experience of [Sfax](#), the cooperation between the municipality of [Sousse](#), civil society organizations, the university and international actors allowed for a speedy mapping of migrant and refugee populations. With the support of the International Centre for Policy Migration Development (ICMPD) and of the MC2CM project, an in-depth study was conducted to identify specific challenges and needs of these groups regarding access to information, basic services and the socio-economic impact of the crisis. This data served the local Committee for Social Assistance (“Comité local de gestion des aides sociales au profit des migrants, réfugiés et les demandeurs d’asile”) to plan and prioritize the distribution of food and non-food items.

DEVELOPING GENDER-RESPONSIVE APPROACHES TO ADDRESS THE PARTICULAR NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN, GIRLS AND BOYS AND UPHOLDING THE BEST INTEREST OF CHILDREN

Women and children in situations of migration and displacement are considered particularly vulnerable groups by both the GCM and the GCR. These vulnerabilities may be exacerbated during economic lockdowns, the closing of schools and the necessary social distancing. Studies in France, Cyprus, Singapore and Argentina have observed that gender-based and domestic violence have increased exponentially during the COVID-19 crisis.²⁸ The economic consequences of the pandemic also entail a heightened risk of child labor in countries of origin – as remittances plummet due to a loss of income, more children will be forced to support their families financially instead of going to school. Studies with regards to the Ebola epidemic have shown that especially girls hardly ever return to school following closures.²⁹ Cities are therefore working to protect and support migrant and refugee women, children and their families.

In September 2020, the MC2CM project and the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (UCLG-CSIPDHR) organized a “Dialogue on Migrant Women in Cities.” This virtual conference brought together elected officials, municipal workers, researchers, civil society actors and migrant women organizations. In line with the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches promoted by the GCM and GCR, the dialogue enabled local governments to identify good practice for the protection and inclusion of women, while fostering multilevel and multistakeholder cooperation.

²⁸ UNDP (2020): Gender-based violence and COVID-19. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-COVID-19.html>

²⁹ UNESCO (2020): COVID-19 school closures around the world will hit girls hardest. <https://en.unesco.org/news/COVID-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest> and Burzynska, Katarzyna and Contreras, Gabriela (2020): Gendered effects of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Lancet*, 395(10242): 1968. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7292576/>

Good practice presented during the dialogue includes the example of [Turin](#), where local authorities cooperate with local projects, for instance the “Women in Neighborhood” project – a mentorship program for female newcomers by women who have arrived in previous years.³⁰

The City of [Lisbon](#) provides take-away meals to up to 8,500 children of low-income families, who would normally benefit from meals provided in schools and might otherwise not be able to procure regular meals for the whole family.³¹

ADDRESSING WORKPLACE-RELATED VULNERABILITIES INCLUDING IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Promoting decent work is an important goal for both the GCM and GCR. Objective 7 of the GCM calls for addressing workplace-related vulnerabilities including for workers in the informal economy.

Migrants and refugees engaged in informal work are particularly negatively affected by consequences of the global pandemic – while conditions in informal workplaces may make social distancing difficult or impossible, economic lockdowns leave irregular workers without any safety nets.³²

The “Fondo Andaluz de Municipios para la Solidaridad Internacional” (FAMSI) highlights that in many Spanish cities migrant workers are essential actors in sustaining key economic sectors. In Europe, 13% of ‘essential’ workers are migrants working in food production and processing, in the cleaning sector, in agriculture, in the transport and traffic sector, in medical and elderly health care.³³ At the same time, migrants and refugees are also more likely to work for temporary employment agencies, often experiencing more precarious working and living conditions.³⁴ Hence, it quickly became evident that the health of these temporary workers was particularly threatened by the pandemic.

A study commissioned by ICMPD with the municipality of [Sousse](#) shows that a great number of migrants living in urban and peri-urban areas work in the informal sector. One third of those participating in the survey declared to have lost the entirety of their income due to the health and economic crisis. As the study allowed the municipality to realize that working conditions in the informal sector were even worse than assumed, the municipality organized a dialogue with civil society associations to advocate for national policies that would ensure the respect of migrants’ rights, regularize individuals in situation of irregularity, include migrants in the formal economy and fight human trafficking.

³⁰ MC2CM Webinar (2020): Dialogue on Migrant Women in Cities. 10.09.2020. <https://www.uclg.org/en/media/events/mediterranean-city-city-migration-dialogue-migrant-women-cities-2020>

³¹ C40 Knowledge Hub (2020). Equity and inclusion in cities’ COVID-19 responses: examples from around the world. https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

³² ILO (2020): ILO brief: COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/publications/WCMS_743623/lang-en/index.htm

³³ European Commission (2020): The crucial contribution of migrant workers to Europe’s coronavirus response. <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/crucial-contribution-migrant-workers-europes-coronavirus-response>

³⁴ Andriescu, Monica (2020): Under Lockdown Amid COVID-19 Pandemic, Europe Feels the Pinch from Slowed Intra-EU Labor Mobility. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/COVID19-europe-feels-pinch-slowed-intra-eu-labor-mobility> and CREST (2020): COVID-19 places migrant workers in highly vulnerable situations. <https://crest.iom.int/news/COVID-19-places-migrant-workers-highly-vulnerable-situations%C2%A0>

2. ENSURING SAFE ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR ALL

- **GCM Objective 15:** Provide access to basic services for migrants
- **GCR Paragraph 66, 72 – 73, 78, 80:** Meet refugees’ needs and support communities; facilitate access by refugees and host communities to quality health care; appropriate accommodation; sufficient, safe and nutritious food

During the negotiations over the GCM and GCR, local authorities and city networks advocated strongly for language that would call for guaranteeing residents’ equal access to municipal services regardless of migration or legal status. In their final versions, both international Compacts do indeed underline inclusive and non-discriminatory provision of services and assistance to uphold human rights of migrants and refugees (GCM Objective 15 and GCR Paragraph 66). Objective 15 of the GCM further highlights the significance of providing information on access to basic services in a gender and child-sensitive manner, ensuring safe access, incorporating the health needs of migrants into national and local health-care plans and facilitating inclusive and equitable quality education for migrant children.

PROVIDING INFORMATION ON AVAILABLE SERVICES, REFERRAL MECHANISMS AND OUTREACH INITIATIVES

Delivering timely, comprehensible and accurate information on access to basic services to vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees, is crucial in a pandemic context, where local and national situations are fluid and undergo frequent changes.

Cities have launched communication campaigns on COVID-19 and access to basic services and health facilities in many different languages to ensure that residents have access to this vital information. In **Vienna**, the municipality has established a multilingual information center on COVID-19, which not only provides answers to frequently asked questions, but also allows residents to contact the local administration via email, phone or Facebook and to ask questions in 24 different languages. The city of **Gaziantep** has published information brochures and radio programs in a variety of languages to keep the population updated on quarantine measures, available health support and access to basic services.³⁵ In **Ramallah**, the municipality uses social media and public banners to communicate protective and precautionary measures to different parts of the population and harnesses its membership in the “Creative Cities Network” to encourage representatives of the creative industry to develop and share awareness messages as part of the UNESCO “#weRculture” campaign.

The municipality of **Sfax** leveraged existing cooperation with a wide range of civil society organizations, migrant and refugee-led associations as well as the local university to provide information on quarantine measures and access to essential services to vulnerable populations, who are difficult to reach through official channels. Similarly, **Vienna** made use of its “Interreligious Dialogues” to facilitate exchange on protective measures and share information on food distribution.

³⁵ UCLG (2020): Live Learning Experience on Migration. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/eng_briefing_1le_migration_0.pdf

ENSURING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

Cities suffering from housing shortages are confronted with a major challenge during the COVID-19 crises as homelessness makes the concept of social distancing more than difficult to realize in practice. This moves cities to adopt creative solutions and cooperate with universities or the private sector to provide the vulnerable populations with temporary shelter and opportunities to self-quarantine. **Grenoble** and **Lampedusa** have opened up vacant apartments and public facilities to migrants, while **Rabat** is providing shelter in university campus facilities.³⁶ **Dortmund** opened homeless shelters, usually only operating during the cold season, as accommodation for vulnerable and stranded populations. In addition, the city coordinated local initiatives to ensure assistance in different languages and provision of supplies for persons in quarantine. **Madrid** is making use of centers for asylum seekers and homeless population to host persons suffering from COVID-19 symptoms and is offering symptom-free persons without a home shelter in hotels and hostels.³⁷

As the economic lockdown and the crisis that has ensued threatens the livelihoods of low-income populations, the Mayor of **Vienna** announced that rent payments could be suspended in public housing and that no evictions would take place during the crisis. Thinking along similar lines, **Nantes Metropole** has established a housing solidarity fund to support those who have lost their jobs during the crisis by guaranteeing rental payments.³⁸

Next to housing, the distribution of food and non-food items, such as medical and hygiene products, is high on the agenda of the municipalities in the COVID-19 crisis. In **Amman**, Mayor Shawarbeh announced that all residents shall benefit from equal access to services regardless of legal status. Furthermore, water and bread was to be distributed each day to vulnerable households during the lockdown.³⁹ Following the example of New York City, the municipality of **Grenoble** developed plans for a local ID card to bypass access barriers and is advocating for universal access to basic services vis-à-vis the national level.

Under the slogan “Sousse solidaire”, the Committee for Social Assistance to Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (“Comité local de gestion des aides sociales au profit des migrants, réfugiés et les demandeurs d’asile”), coordinated by the municipality of **Sousse** in cooperation with local civil society, private sector actors, government representatives, international organizations and migrant student and worker associations has launched a call for solidarity and support and is organizing the short-term humanitarian crisis response. Combining the resources of Committee members with financial and in-kind donations provided by local citizens enables the municipality to ensure social support to vulnerable populations independently of origin, religion or legal status. The municipality highlights that the cooperation with migrants and refugees has been crucial in setting up the Committee, conducting a mapping of vulnerable populations, launching the call for solidarity, distributing relevant information and planning and executing the distribution of care packages. Migrants and refugees as well as their associations served as mediators and interpreters throughout the crisis response and proved crucial for establishing a relationship of trust between the municipality and the vulnerable groups.

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ C40 Knowledge Hub (2020): Equity and inclusion in cities’ COVID-19 responses: examples from around the world. https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

³⁸ ibid

³⁹ Lock, Helen (2020): The World’s Mayors Are Calling for Refugees and Migrants to Be Protected Against COVID-19. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/mayors-call-refugees-COVID-19-protection/>

INCORPORATING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES INTO NATIONAL AND LOCAL HEALTH-CARE PLANS

With Paragraph 76 and 77 of the GCR as well as Objective 15 of the GCM, nation states acknowledge the importance of inclusive quality health-care systems being open to local populations, migrants and refugees. Following the principle of “leaving no one behind” has become essential during the pandemic to protect migrants’ and refugees’ health as an inherent part of comprehensive public health strategies.

In order to ensure universal access to health care for all persons suffering from COVID-19, the Mayor of [Sfax](#) has called upon the Governor of Sfax as well as the Regional Health Directorate to allow migrants to access sanitary services and COVID-19 testing and treatment in the hospitals irrespective of legal status. The municipality has also followed up on this call to action by collaborating with other decentralized actors as well as the organization “Médecins du Monde” to ensure non-discriminatory access to health services and testing.

BEYOND THE MEDITERRANEAN

In [Mogadishu](#), the municipality collaborated with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students in order to establish portable hand-washing stations in public places across the city as well as in camps for internationally displaced people.⁴⁰

In order to provide medical assistance and testing in neighborhoods with limited access to health facilities, the city of [Montréal](#) converted public transport buses into mobile clinics. This enabled a high number of refugees and migrants to benefit from COVID-19 screening and medical support.⁴¹

Through a local study and survey among migrant populations, the city of [Sousse](#) realized that despite announcements by the Governor declaring that all persons with COVID-19 symptoms would be treated free of charge, around 20% of interviewed migrants were convinced that they would be barred from accessing medical services and an even higher number was afraid that visiting a hospital could lead to their deportation by the immigration authorities. These findings confirmed the city’s priority to strengthen outreach and communication and to build trust with refugee and migrant communities. During the distribution of care packages to vulnerable populations, the municipality also became aware of the fact that a number of refugees and migrants suffered from psychological troubles and that several female migrants and refugees were in need of particular assistance during pregnancy. The city thus coordinated with the National Planning Office and private doctors to ensure adequate support for these individuals.

⁴⁰ UNHCR (2020): Cities and Municipalities’ inclusive responses in the face of COVID-19. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/index.php/article/cities-and-municipalities-inclusive-responses-face-COVID-19>

⁴¹ Lock, Helen (2020): The World’s Mayors Are Calling for Refugees and Migrants to Be Protected Against COVID-19. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/mayors-call-refugees-COVID-19-protection/>

3. LEVERAGING CONTRIBUTIONS OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

- **GCM Objective 16:** Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion
- **GCM Objective 18:** Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences
- **GCR Paragraph 40:** Leverage contributions of refugee-led organizations
- **GCR Paragraph 70–71:** Promote economic opportunities, decent work and job creation

Throughout the negotiations over the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees, cities have proven to be strong advocates for social cohesion and inclusive solutions engaging and benefiting migrants, refugees and the local population. This approach is reflected in objective 16 of the GCM which calls for capitalizing “on the skills, cultural and language proficiency of migrants and receiving communities”⁴² to realize inclusive and cohesive societies. Likewise, the GCR paragraph 40 highlights the important role that refugee-led organizations can play in “assessing community strengths and needs, inclusive and accessible planning and programme implementation.”⁴³ Moreover, paragraph 70 and 71 of the GCR underline that inclusive economies should build on economic access and skill recognition of refugees and host communities, while the GCM objective 18 acknowledges the important economic contributions migrants can make to the countries of destination and calls for a mutual recognition of foreign qualifications and non-formally acquired skills.

LEVERAGING MIGRANTS’ AND REFUGEES’ PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND KNOW HOW TO UPHOLD ESSENTIAL ECONOMIC SECTORS AND COUNTER ECONOMIC RECESSION

For many hosting countries, the pandemic has made it abundantly clear the great extent to which essential domestic sectors such as agriculture, service delivery, transportation or public health depend on foreign workers. However, barriers to formal employment and lack of skill recognition limit options to leverage the vital qualifications and know-how that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers could contribute to crisis response and recovery efforts. The Council of Europe and the UNHCR have therefore urgently called on states to integrate refugee and asylum seeker health professionals into the fight against COVID-19.⁴⁴ Some first steps have already been taken, for example by the government of Spain, which allowed over 2,000 Venezuelan doctors waiting for the evaluation of their credentials, to work. In Germany, the region of North Rhine-Westphalia asked foreign doctors, who are still undergoing the skill recognition process, to practice under the supervision of German-licensed physicians. Other European countries have even gone further – Portugal regularized all migrants and asylum seekers with pending residence permit applications, Italy announced that undocumented migrants engaged in agriculture, domestic work and social care could apply for a temporary residence and work permit of six months and Belgium decided to open the way for asylum seekers to work during their application process.⁴⁵

⁴² United Nations (2018): Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195 ⁴³ United Nations (2018): Global Compact on Refugees. https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf

⁴⁴ UNHCR (2020): The Council of Europe and UNHCR support Member States in bringing refugee health workers into the COVID-19 response. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/4/5e957e9611/council-europe-unhcr-support-member-states-bringing-refugee-health-workers.html>

⁴⁵ ODI (2020): Key workers. Migrants’ contribution to the COVID-19 response. <https://www.odi.org/migrant-key-workers-COVID-19/>

In Tunisia, cities like [Sousse](#) and [Sfax](#) are cooperating with civil society actors and unions to advocate for similar steps that would allow the inclusion of undocumented migrants into the social and economic response and recovery. Claiming that the city could only benefit from a regularization of migrants particularly working in the sectors of construction, food services and tourism, the municipality of [Sousse](#) is supporting a legislative proposal for their regularization developed by Tunisian NGOs.

BUILDING ON THE KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTIONS OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES TO ENSURE INCLUSIVE CRISIS RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Next to their essential support to local and national economies, migrants and refugees also have an important part to play as mediators and interlocutors, bringing their knowledge on local challenges and needs as well as their connections to different urban communities into municipal crisis management and recovery efforts.

In cities such as [Durban](#), [Milan](#), [Sfax](#) and [Tunis](#), local authorities have found ways to partner with community leaders, faith organizations, migrant worker and student associations to develop pragmatic solutions for contacting and supporting migrants and refugees that the municipality may not have been able to reach by itself.⁴⁶

In line with such inclusionary approaches, the municipal government of [Sousse](#) included refugees and migrants in the creation of the local Committee for Social Assistance right from the very start. The city recognized the immense value of migrants' and refugees' recommendations during the planning and implementation processes, highlighting their essential role as bridges to and partners in a wide range of communities. Through this mediation the municipality established working relations and trust with communities on the ground and has thereby considerably improved its capacity for needs identification and targeted distribution of care packages.



SOUSSE STUDY



⁴⁶ Experience of the Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity

4. COUNTERING MISINFORMATION AND COMMUNICATING INCLUSIVE NARRATIVES

- **GCM Objective 17:** Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration
- **GCR Paragraph 84:** Foster good relations and peaceful coexistence

Both the GCM and the GCR call to fight discrimination and foster good relations between migrants, refugees and host communities. Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, misinformation and the spread of misleading rumors regarding migrant and refugee populations and movements has been a growing challenge around the world. It is essential to recognize that the distribution of misinformation may be facilitated and accelerated by increasing digitalization, however, in the end, misinformation is less a technology than a communication problem.⁴⁷ The GCM therefore calls to counter misinformation on migrants and migration with “an open and evidence-based public discourse on migration and migrants in partnership with all parts of society, that generates a more realistic, humane and constructive perception.”⁴⁸

Worldwide, migrants and refugees have become scapegoats in the COVID-19 crisis and are being stigmatized in host countries, in transit as well as upon their return to their countries of origin.⁴⁹ During a recent “Live Learning Experience” organized by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-HABITAT, in collaboration with the MC2CM project, on migration in cities, participants from municipal authorities have drawn attention to this negative development and declared that in contrast to reactions to the pandemic, the virus would develop across borders and would not discriminate.⁵⁰

ACTING AGAINST INTOLERANCE, RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING EVIDENCE-BASED NARRATIVES

Rather than turning a blind eye to discrimination and xenophobia, cities strive to proactively turn the COVID-19 emergency into an opportunity to counter discrimination and raise awareness for the benefits of inclusive strategies building on the contributions of host societies, refugees and migrants during acute crisis management but also in the long-term.

The municipal authority in [Rabat](#), for instance, is preparing an action plan for awareness-raising against racism, xenophobia and hate-speech. On the one hand, the city plans to draw the attention of the local host community to the precarious situation in which many migrants and refugees live in the urban context. On the other hand, it is equally important to highlight the many ways in which migrants and refugees contribute to local crisis management and will play essential roles in economic and social recovery.

⁴⁷ The Open Society Foundations and Columbia University's Program on Forced Migration and Health: (2020) Informal Coordination Call.
⁴⁸ United Nations (2018): Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195
⁴⁹ IOM (2020): Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs-60.pdf>
⁵⁰ UCLG (2020): Live Learning Experience: Beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19. Migration- Leveraging migrants' contribution to the emergency and addressing vulnerabilities. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/eng_briefing_lle_migration_0.pdf

In [Sousse](#), a survey among migrants and refugees showed that many avoid using public transport, preferring instead more expensive alternatives, such as cab services. After discovering that this was due to the fear of discrimination and verbal attacks, the municipality is currently working on mainstreaming an anti-discrimination strategy into the public transport sector. Moreover, the celebration of World Refugee Day in June 2020 served as a kickoff for the city’s plans to establish cooperation with other municipalities in geographic proximity to collaborate in protecting migrants’ and refugees’ rights.

Ensuring evidence-based communication during the crisis also requires direct cooperation with the media. While the municipality of [Sousse](#) has organized joint media interviews with migrant associations to showcase their work, the city of [Sfax](#) in cooperation with “Terre d’Asile Tunisie” has launched a call for solidarity via social networks and collaborated with two local radio stations to inform residents about recent developments and inclusive approaches undertaken by the municipality in cooperation with civil society, international organizations and migrant associations.

City-to-City cooperation can also play an important role in supporting cities in developing constructive communication on migration in the COVID-19 context. In June 2020, the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM) held a three-day peer-learning event on “[Communication on Migration](#).”⁵¹ The sessions gave cities from different parts of the world a platform to discuss concrete strategies to rebalance migration narratives in order to strengthen local migration governance, foster social cohesion and increase the quality of life for all inhabitants. With similar objectives in mind, the Mayors Migration Council is offering cities a selection of “Key Messages for Mayors and City Officials to Advocate for the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Response and Recovery Efforts” as part of its COVID-19 Resource Hub.⁵² Finally, the Mayors Mechanism of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the Government of Canada are co-chairing a new GFMD working group on migration narratives, which will for the upcoming months focus particularly on narratives in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.⁵³

5. BUILDING BACK BETTER THROUGH EQUAL PARTNERSHIPS

- **GCM Objective 19:** Create conditions for migrants and diaspora to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries
- **GCM Objective 23:** Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration
- **GCR Paragraph 37 and 38:** Engage local authorities in local and global multi-stakeholder and partnership approaches

The GCM and GCR highlight that successful realization of international agreements fundamentally depends on the cooperation between a wide range of actors from different levels of governance, making “multi-stakeholder and partnership approaches” a central pillar of the GCR, while the GCM builds on “whole-of-society” and “whole-of-government” strategies. Local authorities are recognized in the GCR paragraphs 37 and 38 as first responders to refugee situations and city networks are encouraged to share innovative solutions to urban displacement. Likewise, the GCM objective 23 emphasizes the potential of local authorities to contribute to international cooperation for implementing the global agreement and calls for the integration of municipal positions in programs and planning “to ensure good governance as well as policy coherence across levels of government and policy sectors, and maximize the effectiveness and impact of international development cooperation.”⁵⁴ Recalling the interdependence between migration and sustainable development, the GCM objective 19 furthermore underlines the need to mainstream migration in development planning and to empower migrants to contribute to sustainable development in countries of origin and destination.

DEVELOPING WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY AND WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACHES

While international solidarity, burden-sharing and transnational cooperation are fundamental principles for the implementation of the GCR and GCM, the COVID-19 crisis has reinforced an already preexisting trend towards unilateral migration policies at the national level. In urban settings, however, the whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches have suddenly become even more vital and are therefore promoted by local authorities mostly in cooperation with civil society partners and international organizations.

The city of [Turin](#) has created a solidarity network bringing together the Municipal Operational Centre (Coc), the Crisis Unit of the Piedmont Region, the City Social Services, local associations, neighborhood houses, cooperatives and the Archdiocese, among others, to coordinate the resources of the city administration and the local community, to organize the distribution of food and basic necessities, to offer shelter to people in need, emotional support and to facilitate cultural mediation.⁵⁵

⁵¹ MC2CM (2020): Peer-Learning Event. Communication on Migration: Rebalancing the Narrative to Strengthen Local Governance.
• Concept Note and Agenda: https://www.dropbox.com/s/job43qx3l3yc12b/MC2CM_PLE%20Seville_Communication%20%26%20Narrative%20on%20Migration_Agenda_EN.pdf?dl=0
• Background Paper: https://www.dropbox.com/s/7144ow5rm9b2yvo/MC2CM_PLE%20Seville_Communication%20%26%20Narrative%20on%20Migration_Background%20note_EN.pdf?dl=0
⁵² Mayors Migration Council (2020): Working Draft of Key Messages for Mayors and City Officials to Advocate for the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Response and Recovery Efforts. <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/COVID19-1/key-messages>
⁵³ GFMD (2020): GFMD Ad Hoc Working Group on Public Narratives on Migration. <https://www.gfmd.org/pfp/ppd/11966>

⁵⁴ United Nations (2018): Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195
⁵⁵ EUROCITIES (2020): Turin – Solidarity network. <https://COVIDnews.euocities.eu/2020/04/01/torino-solidarity-network/>

For its part, **Madrid** has launched public-private partnerships to raise funds for sheltering homeless populations and providing food to vulnerable families. Leveraging municipal convening power, the city brought together the foodbank, the World Central Kitchen and the city’s fire department to distribute meals to families with alternative accommodation.⁵⁶

In cooperation with “La Maison du droit et des migrations de Sfax” and “Terre d’Asile Tunisie” the municipality of **Sfax** launched an official appeal, calling upon the local civil society, refugee and migrant associations, investors and citizens to join a solidarity initiative for refugee and migrant communities in precarious situations. Furthermore, the municipality called upon the IOM for assistance, which led to the distribution of care packages and vouchers to vulnerable migrants and refugees in the city. The municipality highlights the important role that associations of migrant students and entrepreneurs have played during crisis management. A similar experience was highlighted in the municipality of **Sousse**, where migration associations as well as individual migrants and refugees collaborated with the municipality and NGOs and played an essential role in establishing trust with local communities, leading outreach and contributing to the distribution of care packages.

In **Rabat** the cooperation between the municipal and the national authorities resulted in a strengthening of local government resources, allowing to enhance access to basic services for all residents. The municipal authorities believe that in the joint fight against COVID-19, local and national objectives have become even stronger aligned, though swift short-term cooperation remains challenging.

Several cities highlight that the lack of political and legal mandates for reception and integration of migrants at the local level at times limits the options for local authorities to directly collaborate with international organizations, which rather seek collaboration with national authorities. In a recent policy brief on “COVID-19 in an urban world”, the United Nations Secretary General emphasizes that “inclusive, participatory, multi-level governance are at the heart of local responses, and collaboration between all levels of government needs to be institutionalized” in order to develop effective short-term crisis management and medium- to long-term recovery.⁵⁷

However, for many municipalities in Northern Africa and the Middle East, migrant-sensitive cooperation between the local and the national level is impeded either by the complete absence of an effective national framework for asylum and integration or (in the majority of cases) by the lack of effective decentralization and localization of national legislation regarding migrants and refugees. Even in normal times, local authorities were often missing the necessary political mandates, capacities and resources to address the needs of migrants and refugees. This situation has become even more of a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic as local authorities simply cannot afford to leave anyone behind if they want to ensure the safety of the population and protect the local economy. As a result, local advocacy efforts towards national governments are on the rise.

The municipalities of **Sfax** and **Sousse** are calling for both stronger decentralization and clear distribution of competencies between the local, regional and national levels as well as the regularization of migrants present in the territory.

⁵⁶ C40 (2020): Equity and inclusion in cities’ COVID-19 responses: examples from around the world. https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US
⁵⁷ Guterres, António (2020): COVID-19 in an Urban World. UN Policy Brief. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_COVID_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

To strengthen the municipal voice, the city of **Sfax** has created a working group, bringing together different cities, the “Ligue tunisienne des droits de l’homme” and “Terre d’Asile Tunisie” to develop joint recommendations for the Office of the Prime Minister to change current asylum policies, grant migrants the right to work and regularize persons without papers. The city of **Sfax** also sought the exchange with members of Parliament and the Governor and considers it an important success of its sensitizing efforts that the national Parliament, the Ministry of Human Rights and the Office of the Governor are now engaging in debates on immigration.

EMPOWERING HOST COMMUNITIES, MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AND BUILDING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable recovery needs to strive for a new normal. In the spirit of both GCM objectives 19 and 23 as well as the GCR paragraph 38, the city networks UCLG and Metropolis have partnered with UN-HABITAT in launching the “Live Learning Experience: Beyond the Immediate Response to the Outbreak” in March 2020.⁵⁸ Recognizing that local and regional governments are at the forefront of crisis response, the “Live Learning Experience” brings together municipal, regional and national representatives as well as international experts in a series of virtual workshops and dialogues covering crisis response and recovery with regard to topics such as migration, mobility, housing, local finance, food systems, women’s leadership and digital technologies. Guided by the credo “Firsthand Experiences to Rethink our Cities Following the Pandemic,” representatives of municipalities and communities also share good practice and learn from each other through the virtual “Cities for Global Health” platform co-led by UCLG, Metropolis and ALLAS in cooperation with a wide range of city networks worldwide.⁵⁹ Many other city networks such as the Mayors Migration Council or EUROCIITIES have taken equally timely action and provide their members with knowledge resources and key messages to shape inclusive local communication, crisis management and recovery.⁶⁰

In a joint statement, Mayors leading the Mayors Migration Council have reaffirmed their commitment to shaping inclusive and resilient communities through the implementation of the GCM and the GCR and called upon national and international decision-makers to collaborate with local authorities in ensuring safe and equitable access to services regardless of migration status, empowering migrants and refugees to contribute to combating the COVID-19 crisis and to fight misinformation, racism and xenophobia, in order to strengthen solidarity in all COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.⁶¹

Beyond the immediate priority to protect lives, cities and their networks are aware that the COVID-19 pandemic will have drastic long-term consequences, which may not even be fully foreseeable in the years to come. Therefore, recovery efforts need to be more than “back to business as usual.”

Arguing that the “COVID-19 pandemic is working as magnifying glass that highlights the aspects in which we were already behind,” UCLG has adopted an innovative Decalogue as a political charter for the aftermath of the crisis and as a contribution to the “UN75 dialogue.”⁶²

⁵⁸ UCLG (2020): Life Learning Experience: Beyond the Immediate Response to the Outbreak. <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>
⁵⁹ Cities for Global Health (2020): Firsthand Experiences to Rethink our Cities Following the Pandemic. <https://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org/>
⁶⁰ Mayors Migration Council (2020): Join Mayors in building an inclusive COVID-19 recovery for all <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-COVID19> and EUROCIITIES (2020): COVID-19 and recovery. <https://eurocities.eu/goals/COVID-19-and-recovery/>
⁶¹ Mayors Migration Council (2020): Joint Statement. Inclusive COVID-19 Response & Recovery. <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-COVID19>
⁶² UCLG (2020): Decalogue for the post COVID-19 era. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/decalogue_for_the_post_COVID-19_era.pdf

In order to prevent the current health crisis from transforming into a global social crisis, UCLG is calling for a new form of multilateral governance, placing communities’ interests and needs at the center of policy development and decision-making through subsidiarity and decentralized cooperation. In order to protect present and future generations UCLG demands a worldwide green deal that would reconcile community resilience and the protection of the most vulnerable with sustainable economic growth models based on people-centered production systems. Finally, the city network highlights the need for a new equality framework in urban planning, legislation and development.

The message of the UCLG Decalogue is strengthened by the “Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force” launched by members of the C40 city network in April 2020. In a joint statement, mayors from all over the world underlined that a healthy, equitable and sustainable recovery must be based on public services and investment, community resilience and climate action benefiting economic recovery and social equity. Through the “C40 Mayors Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery”⁶³ cities showcase what they are already doing to build back better towards healthy, equitable and sustainable cities, commit to nine central principles for a green and just recovery and call upon national governments as well as international and regional institutions to focus stimulus investment and recovery funds on a fair and sustainable transition, while recognizing the central role of local authorities in building resilient communities.

⁶³ C40 (2020): C40 Mayors Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery. <https://c40.my.salesforce.com/sfc/p/36000001Enhz/a/1Q000000kVoY/kuR-1PLHMGR2K9eEbo8aivV.xPegZVTqwt.EjX.4a.hk>

III. RECOVERY AS TIME OF OPPORTUNITY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITIES, STATES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

“Now is the time to rethink and reshape the urban world. Now is the moment to adapt to the reality of this and future pandemics. And now is our chance to recover better, by building more resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities.” ANTÓNIO GUTERRES⁶⁴

The following recommendations build on the UN Secretary General’s Policy Brief “COVID-19 in an Urban World”, on international agreements adopted by UN member states, in particular the GCM, the GCR, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as on transnational city declarations and statements committing local authorities to the achievement of these global goals. Among them are the MC2CM Policy Recommendations⁶⁵, the Marrakesh Mayors Declaration⁶⁶, the UCLG Manifesto on Migration⁶⁷, the MMC Statement on Inclusive COVID-19 Response & Recovery, the C40 Mayors Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery and the UCLG Decalogue on the post-COVID-19 era.

1. BUILDING RESILIENT, EQUITABLE AND INTERCONNECTED URBAN COMMUNITIES

Lessons from the UCLG Live Learning Experience, the 100 Resilient Cities Network as well as the C40 Mayors’ Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery demonstrate that resilience is key to mitigate and deal with external shocks in urban systems. Urban resilience cuts across many fields such as social cohesion and equality, non-discriminatory access to public services, housing and infrastructure, decent work and access to the formal economy, participatory urban planning as well as inclusive narratives and communication strategies. Respecting the Right to the City, as a vision of inclusive and participatory city building, should thus be at the heart of COVID-19 recovery strategies.

Local and regional governments should strengthen and institutionalize ad hoc measures taken during the crisis to ensure non-discriminatory access to services, health care and housing for all city residents. In order to guarantee the inclusiveness of such action, firewalls⁶⁸ between service providers and immigration authorities are crucial. Future municipal infrastructure planning should also place a particular focus on expanding digital infrastructure to facilitate telework and remote education. Furthermore, as governments closest to local residents, local authorities have a particular responsibility to shape inclusive narratives and open-up two-way communication channels to ensure participatory urban development.

⁶⁴ Guterres, António (2020): Launch of policy brief on COVID-19 and cities. COVID-19 in an Urban World. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/COVID-19-urban-world>

⁶⁵ MC2CM (2018): Urban Challenges and Opportunities for the Mediterranean Region. Policy Recommendations. https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/1_2018/MC2CM/Policy_Recommendation_EN_Online.pdf

⁶⁶ Global Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development (2018): Marrakech Mayors Declaration. Cities working together for migrants and refugees. http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/en_mf_declaration.pdf

⁶⁷ UCLG (2019). Manifesto. The Future of Migration. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/en_manifesto_migration.pdf

⁶⁸ The concept of “firewalls” protects migrants without regular status when accessing public services. Firewalls prohibit the sharing of client information with other public bodies, especially immigration authorities.

Overall, city representatives can draw on rich collections of good practice and tools established prior to and during the crisis to inspire strategies for building resilient, equitable and interconnected urban communities.⁶⁹

National authorities should guarantee the sustainability of municipal action by channeling investment in local data collection for evidence-based policy-making, infrastructure building and public service provision. Moreover, national authorities would benefit from strengthening decentralization processes to create enabling frameworks for contextualized and flexible local action. National authorities should furthermore draw consequences from the grave impact of COVID-19 on workers employed in precarious or informal work environments and cooperate with local and regional governments to revise existing policies and to co-create new standards and practices. Following the good practice examples presented in this policy paper, national governments should improve measures to guarantee decent work conditions for all – regardless of status and gender –, expedite and simplify skills recognition, open up additional channels for regular labor migration and review options for regularization of migrant workers in their territories. Furthermore, national, regional and local governments should support small and micro enterprises and start-ups to promote people-centered proximity models of consumption and production, thus rethinking relationships between economic growth and environmental protection.

International organizations and financial institutions should harmonize their local humanitarian and development action with municipal strategies, recognize local and regional governments as partners, beyond implementers of supra-local policies, and support local recovery strategies through capacity building, funding and promotion of city-to-city cooperation and exchange.

2. LEVERAGING CONTRIBUTIONS OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACHES

In many cities and urban areas, migrants and refugees are playing crucial roles in ensuring whole-of-society approaches in COVID-19 crisis management, be it as essential workers in public or private sectors, mediators and translators in information campaigns or volunteers in planning and implementing city-wide emergency strategies.

Local and regional governments should build on these existing and newly established relations with migrant and refugee communities to work towards inclusive social and economic models benefiting migrants, refugees and host communities, for which they strongly advocated during the negotiation of the GCM and the GCR and to which they committed with the Marrakesh Mayors Declaration, the Call to Action of the Mayors Mechanism as well as the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, local and regional governments can make use of their proximity and convening power to bring together public and private sector actors, civil society as well as refugee and migrant associations to jointly strategize and co-create urban strategies for medium-term recovery as well as the long-term aftermath of the crisis.

⁶⁹ See the annex to this policy paper for a collection of resources and tools for local authorities to lead inclusive recovery efforts and build back better.

National authorities as well as **international organizations** should strengthen the capacities, resources and ability of all types of local and regional governments to lead the whole-of-society approaches on the ground; this may take the form of specific funds or calls. Furthermore, they should actively participate in local multi-stakeholder approaches by sharing experience, transferring local lessons to the national level and supporting exchange of innovative practices between different cities.

3. HARNESSING BENEFITS OF WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACHES

When it comes to questions of migration, displacement and integration, whole-of-government approaches remain challenging in many countries. The strict separation of responsibilities between national authorities – in charge of migration and asylum policies – and local authorities – responsible for the well-being of local residents and social cohesion – often prevents effective feedback loops between the local and the national levels. This is problematic insofar as national migration policies have a direct impact on cities and often build less on humanitarian considerations and more directly on the national perception of local integration capacities and political will. However, if local authorities lack channels to communicate their local experience, the consequence is a vertical policy incoherence resulting in the lack of local resources, capacities and funding to ensure that local communities would benefit from the positive development effects of hosting migrants and refugees.

Local and regional authorities should therefore continue and step up their efforts for better coordination with national authorities individually as well as through national associations. In some countries, local and regional authorities may be frustrated by national COVID-19 strategies that explicitly exclude persons in irregular situations. While it is important to draw attention to such gaps, local authorities should do so with constructive proposals to engage the national government in common and nation-wide solutions to leave no one behind.

National authorities should consider the COVID-19 recovery period as an opportunity to advance decentralization strategies by adopting new legislation on subsidiarity where it has been lacking to this point and putting existing legislation into practice. Local and regional authorities should be included in all stages of developing and implementing decentralization strategies. These should cover not only the transfer of legal competencies for hosting migrants and refugees to local and regional governments but also adequate capacities, resources and options to raise funding to foster inclusive economic development and social cohesion.

International organizations should promote and facilitate dialogue and cooperation between local, regional and national governments on questions of migration governance, integration and developing perspectives for potential migrants in cities of origin and transit. A positive example to build on are the local Migration Governance Indicators (local MGI) currently developed by the IOM, which not only enable local authorities to identify strengths, gaps and potential in local migration frameworks and action but also foster local-national dialogues.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ IOM (2019): Migration Governance Indicators: A Global Perspective. <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-governance-indicators-global-perspective>

4. OPENING UP SPACES FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP TO PARTICIPATE IN MULTILATERAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Leveraging the positive effects of migration while combating climate change, inequality and social exclusion represents a global challenge in need of global solutions. Effective solutions, however, have not been conceived and can surely not be implemented through inter-governmental debates and actions only. During the negotiations and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the GCM and the GCR, local and regional governments have demonstrated the high value of their expertise for ensuring that international agreements reflect and respond to realities on the ground. Be that as it may, both regional and international governance processes still have a long way to go when it comes to effective multi-level and multi-stakeholder engagement to promote horizontal and vertical policy coherence.

Local and regional authorities should work towards greater coordination between the many city networks operating at the regional and international levels to prevent fragmentation and ensure that their voices are clearly heard in inter-governmental debates and by international actors. Positive developments constitute the establishment of go-to actors for cities, states and international organizations in different thematic areas such as the UCLG Community of Practice on Migration, the Mayors Mechanism⁷¹ of the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD), the Mayors Migration Council and the C40 network. Furthermore, the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments brings together a wide range of city networks for joint coordination and advocacy on global policy processes regarding the SDGs, the climate change agenda, migration and the New Urban Agenda.

National governments should open up regional (European, Asian, African, etc.) and international inter-governmental processes and fora to the participation of local and regional governments by a) including representatives from these levels in their national delegations, b) ensuring spaces for transnational city-to-city coordination and joint advocacy development as well as c) creating common spaces for national, regional and local representatives to develop policies on topics affecting all levels of governance. Particular attention should be paid to empowering local and regional governments to co-design all future processes of implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM and the GCR at the national, regional and international levels. A first precedent in this regard is the integration of the Mayors Mechanism led by UCLG, MMC and IOM in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Another noteworthy development is the involvement of local governments and city organizations like UCLG and MMC in the working groups of the UN Network on Migration and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund dedicated to the implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM.

International organizations should make use of their presence at local, national and international level to link actors in the sense of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. In particular, humanitarian and development organizations need to revise their self-conception – moving from implementers of migrant and refugee responses to catalytic convening powers bringing together a wide range of actors for transformative solutions. In this sense, international organizations should also promote the access of local and regional governments to regional intergovernmental migration dialogues such as the Rabat Process.⁷²

⁷¹ GFMD (n.d.) Mayors Mechanism. <https://www.mayorsmechanism.org/>

⁷² ICMPD (n.d.) : Migration Dialogues. <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/migration-dialogues/rabat-process/>

IV. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated clearer than ever that we are living in a highly interdependent world. While the rapid spread of the virus was only made possible through the tight transnational connections in our globalized system, this interdependence may at the same time be humanity's greatest strength in overcoming the crisis. By building resilient and equitable communities based on effective whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches, leveraging the contributions of residents – nationals, migrants and refugees – and bringing the expertise and know-how of local and municipal leaders into national, regional and international decision-making processes:

We can realize the goals of the GCM, the GCR and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – leaving no one behind in building back better.



ANNEX

SELECTED SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING ON CITIES’ RESPONSES TO COVID-19, THE GCR AND GCM IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Cities for Global Health	Experiences to rethink our cities following the pandemic
Cities Leadership Initiative, Bloomberg Harvard	COVID-19 Local Response Sessions
Council of Europe	Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page
C40 Knowledge Hub	Cities and COVID-19 Equity and inclusion in cities’ COVID-19 responses: examples from around the world C40 Mayors Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery
Danish Refugee Council	Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the Global Compact on Refugees
EUROCITIES	COVID-19 and recovery Live updates COVID-19
IOM	COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot: Cities & local authorities
Mayors Mechanism	Update on COVID-19
Mayors Migration Council	Inclusive COVID-19 Response and Recovery Live Action Tracker: Municipal Migrant & Refugee Sensitive COVID-19 Response & Recovery Efforts
Migration Data Portal	Migration data relevant for the COVID-19 pandemic
Mixed Migration Centre	COVID-19 and the Global Compact for Migration: Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crisis?

Overseas Development Institute	Key workers. Migrants’ contribution to the COVID-19 response
Resilient Cities Network	Coronavirus Speaker Series: Sharing Knowledge to Respond with Resilience
The United States Conference of Mayors	COVID-19: What Mayors Need to Know
UCLG	Live Learning Experience Knowledge Hub #beyondtheoutbreak Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath
United Nations Secretary General	United Nations Secretary General’s Policy Brief COVID-19 in an Urban World Key messages of the Policy Brief
UN-HABITAT	Cities are on the front lines of COVID-19
UNESCO	Cities’ Response to COVID-19
UNHCR	Cities and Municipalities’ inclusive responses in the face of COVID-19 Responding to COVID-19 in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees
WHO	COVID-19 resource hub for cities and local governments

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