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In collaboration with   MC²CM

Live Learning Experience: *Beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19*

Migration - Leveraging migrants' contribution to the emergency and addressing vulnerabilities

Briefing & Learning Note
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*Launched jointly by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Metropolis, and UN-Habitat on March 25th, 2020, the **#BeyondTheOutbreak Live Learning Experience** (LLE) virtual sessions aim to bring together Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), their associations, and partner organizations to allow and promote meaningful exchange as they find themselves confronting the COVID-19 crisis while maintaining an orderly functioning of public services. Following an initial consultation held during the launching session, the **fifth thematic session** (held on April 16) was devoted to promoting a **collective reflection on the governance of migration during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis**.*

Local and regional governments advocacy efforts for *whole of government* and *whole of society* approaches to migration, defending the right to the city for all

In the current emergency situation, ensuring that safety and protection measures include all inhabitants is not only a human rights issue, but an indispensable mandate to stop the spread of a virus. Important efforts need to be made to reduce migrants' specific vulnerabilities during the outbreak and foster increased recognition of their contribution to host societies. Local and regional governments are trying to demonstrate that human mobility is not only a natural phenomenon but also an asset for societies' resiliency, regardless of peoples' legal status, which should be protected by Right to the City for all.

Despite limited regulatory frameworks and mandates, local governments have risen as key actors in the global debate of migration. Against the rise of discriminatory narratives about migration and migrants, LRGs try to transform the narrative through human rights approaches that acknowledge the wealth and contributions implied by human mobility. Advocating for the effective implementation of a *whole-of-government* and *whole-of-society* approach to migration governance, local governments committed in the [Marrakech Mayoral Declaration](#) (December 2018) to fulfill "at unison" the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees in coordination with all levels of government and with all the actors engaged.

As the voice of local governments in global processes, UCLG holds observer status at the International Organization on Migration (IOM) and participates in different working groups of the UN Migration Network, defending the role of local governments in core issues like basic services provision. Since 2018, local and regional governments have also been part of the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) through the Mayors Mechanism, steered jointly by UCLG, IOM and the Mayors Migration Council (MMC).

In the Mediterranean basin, UCLG and UN-Habitat, together with ICMPD, have been supporting city to city cooperation since 2015 through the MC2CM project, which gathers more than 20 European and Mediterranean cities working together to enhance knowledge, dialogue and action on urban migration governance. The LLE session on Migration was organized in collaboration with the MC2CM project, expanding the conversation to other regions and enhancing exchange with cities from Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

The following local representatives contributed to the session: Eric Piolle, Mayor of Grenoble, Mounir Elloumi, Mayor of Sfax, Mohamed Sadiki, Mayor of Rabat, Souad Abderrahim, Mayor of Tunis, Salvatore Martello, Mayor of Lampedusa, Gissela Chalá, Vice Mayor of Quito, Latif Karadag, Vice Mayor of Gaziantep, and Achille Azemba, Vice-Mayor of Douala 3.

Leveraging migrants contribution and ensuring an inclusive local and regional response to the Covid-19 outbreak

How are local and regional governments ensuring no one, and particularly migrant residents, is left behind in their response to the crisis? How can they leverage the contribution of migrant residents to host societies during the crisis and beyond? The Live Learning Experience on Migration was opened by UCLG's Secretary General **Emilia Saiz**, who noted how "*the virus does not discriminate. There are invisible groups in our society which have to face this pandemic by facing harshest sacrifices*". UN-Habitat's Executive Director, **Maimunah Mohd. Sharif**, followed by recognizing that, "*as local governments, we must take this opportunity to change the mainstream perception of migration, sharing stories about migrants' positive contribution to host communities, fighting prejudices*", and calling for their inclusion in the recovery phase and the development of local plans.

The live consultation that followed helped to reflect on the important contributions of migrant residents, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, food distribution, health care, construction, the informal economy and the care sector. The consultation also helped to identify some of the biggest challenges for LRGs' response to the crisis when considering migrant residents, namely: migration status and working permits, xenophobia, poor living conditions and limited financial resources. Coordination with the national government, language barriers, and lack of information also represent challenges for some LRGs. The level of coordination with different stakeholders received balanced evaluations: CSOs and international organizations working on the ground with migrant and vulnerable populations continue to be key partners for LRGs; as much as coordination with national

authorities, which has also proven crucial for the management of the crisis; while there seems to be room for improvement and further coordination with the private sector and diaspora.

Following this opening, representatives from several LRGs around the world shared the main challenges and initiatives of their cities and regional governments to make sure their response to the Covid-19 crisis includes migrant populations.

The main concern raised by participants had to do with the **different forms of vulnerability** that migrant residents experience during the quarantine phase. In particular, job loss and deprived living conditions affect their capacity to sustain a basic livelihood and access their right to food and other fundamental rights. Poor access to health services and to adequate housing conditions hinders migrants' capacity to comply with quarantine measures and protect themselves from the expansion of the virus. However, and as noted by ICMPD's Director General Michael Spindelegger, "*many local governments have already become cities of solidarity, fastly reacting in support to migrants and IDPs*". In regards to accessing a basic livelihood, Sfax is working with local associations and international organizations to deliver food baskets and coupons for vulnerable migrant residents. Regarding housing-related challenges, cities have come up with a wide range of emergency responses, from Grenoble and Lampedusa opening up vacant apartments and public facilities to migrant residents to Al Hoceima opening up vacant hotels and Rabat doing the same with campus facilities. These solutions have also been related to overall emergency policies to provide housing solutions to homeless citizens.

As recalled by UN Habitat's Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif, local governments bear the responsibility to **combat the rise of racist rumors and fake news targeting migrant residents**. The case of Lampedusa is particularly relevant, due to its location at the crossroads of migratory routes in the

Mediterranean. Mayor of Lampedusa, Salvatore Martello emphasized the importance of combating racist narratives that are rising, linking migration to the spread of the virus, communication materials and strengthening alliances with civil society. Local governments like Grenoble and Quito, which had previously institutionalized municipal human rights systems (as in the case of the former's Rights Protection Council), highlighted the need to develop long-term plans for local social inclusion and conviviality to build local notions of citizenship and enshrined rights universality in the public debate.

Another issue raised by local governments concerns the **administrative burdens faced by undocumented migrants to access basic services**. In order to prevent access barriers, local governments like Sfax have taken a stand in favor of securing universal access to local hospitals by negotiating with the national government. Grenoble, on the other hand, is making efforts to overcome barriers to access by working on the concept of local ID cards, but also carrying out advocacy efforts in favor of universal access at a national level. In close coordination with the national level, cities like Tunis, Gaziantep and Douala try to implement inclusive sanitary responses, comprising disinfection and protection measures. The role of civil society organizations like the Greek Council of Refugees is essential to provide legal support to asylum seekers and isolated minors in situations of extreme vulnerability - including also practical information on how to access fundamental rights as provided by basic public services.

Communication barriers, be it due to language diversity or lack of access to information, was also identified as an important area of policy intervention. Providing adequate information to all the population regardless of origin has been a key focus of many LRGs, as seen in the case Gaziantep, which has developed information brochures and radio programs in different languages about quarantine measures, available health services or other types of support. Sfax has relied on its cooperation scheme with migrant and solidarity associations to provide these residents with information on quarantine measures and on how to access social services.

Participants to the event stressed the key role that **access to information and data** has over the effectiveness of local government responses addressing migrant residents' needs, undermining local governments' capacity to conduct evidence-based policies. The work of grassroots organizations and CSOs was signaled as instrumental to overcome this obstacle. Local governments like Rabat, Tangier and Sousse try to overcome the lack of data by gathering information on migrant populations with a view to expand health protection measures to all inhabitants and ensure that their living conditions meet the requirements of confinement. Sousse
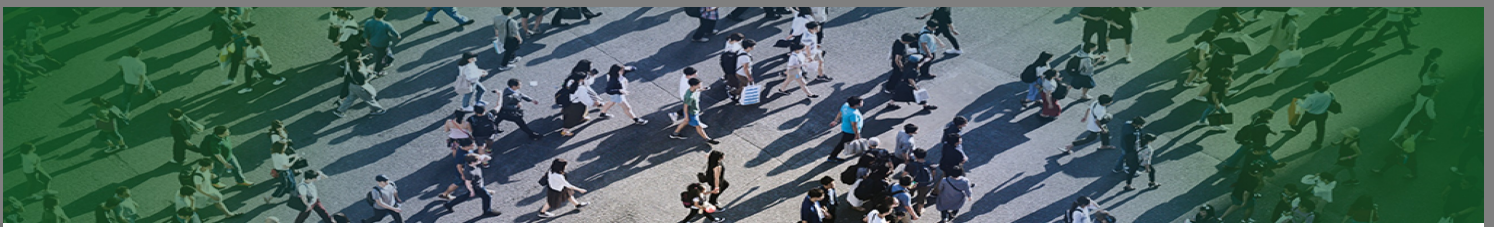
has listed those migrant residents' going through situations of extreme vulnerability, whereas Sfax has enhanced its mapping of migrant population living in the city and its peri-urban area thanks to the support of local CSOs and migrant organizations.

Indeed, **cooperation with civil society** was referred by many local governments as a fundamental mechanism to enhance the effectiveness of their own support measures for migrant residents. Sfax fostered all local associations providing support to migrant residents to develop their work in coordination, whereas Sousse created a local committee for managing social assistance that includes local associations. In the case of Gaziantep, coordination with CSOs has been critical to overcome language barriers. In Quito, the City's work with local associations has had a particular focus on human rights issues, while cooperation with local business has also allowed to expand social assistance initiatives to migrant residents. However, civil society organizations like the Greek Council for Refugees remind that much remains to be done in terms of fostering migrant communities and civil society participation in emergency responses and beyond.

Another key axis of coordination as referred by participants was **multi-level cooperation**, particularly with national government. Douala, Rabat and Gaziantep strongly recalled how local, regional and national authorities should work together in finding the best way to address the specific needs of migrant residents during the quarantine period. In the case of Rabat, local government resources have been strengthened thanks to the contribution of national governments, allowing to enhance access to basic services. Other participants, such as Tunis and Sfax, also noted that local governments should advocate for strengthened decentralization and for dialogue with national authorities to expand access to basic services and rights to all migrants. Grenoble pointed out that LRGs are not against national authorities, yet they need to push for further engagement by national governments to guarantee and protect the rights of all citizens. The Mayor of Lampedusa put the accent on the impact of contradictions between national frameworks and local realities, recalling that despite national lockdown in Italian ports, the island is still receiving the arrival of new migrants and lacks resources to deal with this issue in the context of the quarantine. The contribution of international organizations is also key to support LRGs initiatives in this context, as recalled by the Secretary General of UCLG-MEWA. Sfax shared in this context its specific local cooperation scheme with international institutions, based on supporting food distribution and a basic income for migrants during the quarantine period.

A last point made by participants also referred to this crisis as an opportunity to **leverage migrants' contribution** to their host societies. Grenoble recalled its willingness to reaffirm itself as an inclusive and open city. Opening up participation

channels to migrant residents' has been a defining feature of its local model for social inclusion, which has been strengthened during the quarantine period with a view for migrants' to remain an active part of community life. In this regard, Gaziantep has also been relying on refugees with medical training to reinforce its public health initiatives and improve the city's capacity to address the needs of its refugee population. A similar situation has been replicated all across Turkey, as noted by UCLG-MEWA Secretary General.

Key messages and lessons learnt so far

1. Emergency responses to COVID-19 must protect the Right to the City of all inhabitants regardless of legal status

Whether or not they cross countries' borders, human mobility flows essentially converge towards urban areas looking for opportunities to improve their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a sharp focus to inequalities and the measures taken to mitigate the extension of the virus have particularly affected the most vulnerable communities, among which migrants, refugees and IDPs, who are bound to suffer more deeply the consequences of the crisis. Besides the difficulty to comply with quarantine measures due to poor living conditions or unsafe working conditions, migrants and refugees will likely be the first to suffer the economic recession and lose their jobs. Guaranteeing equal access to basic services, health information and protection devices for all, regardless of legal status, is key to protect lives and to ensure that cities remain places of opportunities for all. Beyond sanitary measures, recovery plans must rely on solidarity and seek to put an end to segregation.

2. COVID-19 will impact human mobility at global level and LRGs are key to defend rights based approaches

The health crisis has profoundly impacted human mobility at large, with border closing becoming the rule and many citizens blocked far from their homes with no clear horizons about how border management will look like in the return to the new normal. In the last few years, LRGs have strongly pushed for a seat at the global table of migration governance, actively advocating for a shift from border-centered to human-centered approaches. In the context of these unprecedented changes, cities should acknowledge the wealth and contributions of human mobility and advocate for long term visions that put public service delivery at the center and harness collective efforts to shift mainstream perceptions over migration. As key actors in the front line, local governments must ensure that solidarity and social cohesion lie at the basis of mitigation and recovery responses.
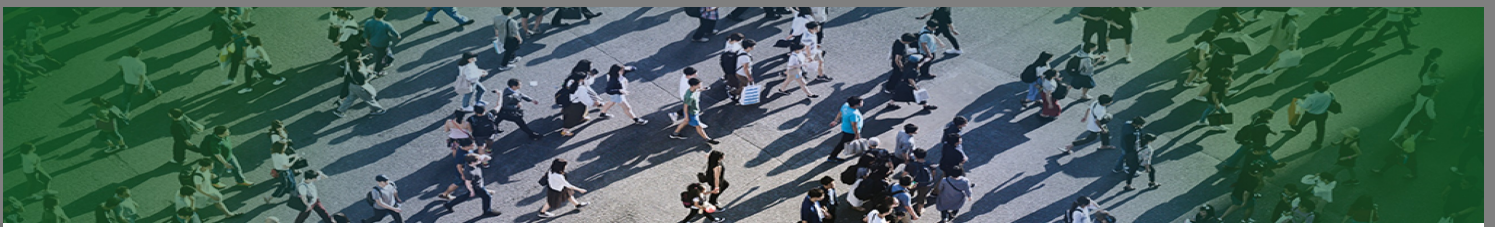
3. Migrants are neighbours and must participate in crisis and recovery responses

The systemic nature of this pandemic and the comprehensive scope of the measures needed to stop it should be the opportunity to stop segregation and build together a new, open and inclusive notion of citizenship. Ensuring meaningful participation implies a shift from assistentialism to a comprehensive approach to urban migration policies that help develop coherent policy frameworks. Acknowledging migrants' contribution to local development and ensuring their participation in the elaboration of local responses to crisis is key to reactivate the economy and prevent raising inequalities. The COVID-19 crisis has shown the existing gap between the essential role of migrants' contributions in core sectors like agriculture and caregiving, and the low protection of their rights and living conditions, with harsh impact for both migrant and host societies. Local governments must advocate for coordinated solutions to ensure that all citizens can contribute to the aftermath.

4. LRGs must counter discrimination and xenophobia, seizing the opportunity to change mainstream perceptions about migration

Beyond struggling economic conditions, migrants, refugees and IDPs in many contexts are also seeing themselves confronted with the rise of xenophobia and discrimination due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Hate speech and distorted narratives linking the outbreak to migration have spread in many parts of the world with harmful effects for entire communities. As the closest level of government to citizens and building on their responsibility to welcome all inhabitants as neighbours, local governments have a role to play in strengthening social cohesion through the promotion of trust and evidence-based approaches and reversing distorted narratives about migration to ensure that migrant communities do not suffer the impact of unfair, racist and fake narratives.

5. Local public service delivery must be universal and temporary measures to protect migrants should become permanent policies

Despite narrow mandates and scarce resources on migration governance, LRGs have maintained their commitment towards universal access to public services. This crisis has shown that local governments are key in ensuring that all citizens stay safe and protected, safeguarding the health of each city resident and, accordingly, the health and well-being of the whole community. Ensuring that everyone can meet the necessary requirements to protect their lives and the health of the whole community is of utmost priority to LRGs all over the world. Thinking of the

aftermath, this crisis reveals the essential role of public service delivery and that reducing its scope would be a mistake. In the same vein, temporary measures implemented to protect the lives of migrants and leverage their contribution to local economic development demonstrate that steps ahead can be taken to permanently improve the living conditions and protect the right to the city of all inhabitants. Solidarity and security appear today as indivisible and local policies should reflect this.

6. Civil society is a key ally for coherent, integral and inclusive responses to the crisis and the aftermath

Civil society and grassroots organizations carry out essential work to improve the living conditions and the participation of the most vulnerable segments of society in many territories, often bridging the gap between burdensome administrative frameworks and citizens' needs. Coordination with civil society organizations is key for local governments not only to respond to the most urgent needs of the population, but also to consolidate a *whole of society* approach to local governance. Throughout their knowledge of territorial realities, their comprehensive data sets and their participatory approaches, civil society organizations hold unique assets to build inclusive strategies at local level. Though acknowledging the key role that local governments play in the inclusion of all citizens and the maintenance of social cohesion, civil society organizations call for local governments to strengthen multi-stakeholder governance and stand ready to engage in collective efforts to build new forms of citizenship and local democracy.

7. Decentralized cooperation and local to national dialogue are key to strengthen local action with global impact

Networking and solidarity appear as essential pillars to foster human centered approaches to migration and to promote bolder action at the global level. In the current scenario of global uncertainty, city-to-city knowledge transfer is an essential lever for successful responses to COVID-19, guiding and supporting cities facing pandemic based on lessons learned on the ground. Dialogue with national governments and enhanced decentralization schemes are also important to allow different territories adapt their responses to specific realities with adequate measures and resources. Coordination among all spheres of government will be even more relevant in the aftermath, when it comes to implementing coherent approaches to human mobility. The international level also plays an essential role in this context and local governments should seize the momentum to call for meaningful dialogue and cooperation among all levels of government.

Resources

The presentations made by the cities during this Live Learning Experience are available here. The Cities for Global Health platform, facilitated by Metropolis, is a living repository of other LRGs' initiatives to confront the COVID-19 crisis. For further information, please refer to the related resources included below.

- UCLG Manifesto *"The Future of Migration"*
- MC2CM Project Policy Recommendations *"Urban Challenges and Opportunities for the Mediterranean Region"*
- UCLG-CSIPDHR *"Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City"*
- GPR2C communiqué *"The Right to the City Facing COVID-19"*
- Public Service International's statement: "Racism and xenophobia are a danger to public health"
- Mayors Migration Council's Live Resource Guide: Municipal Migrant & Refugee Sensitive COVID-19 Responses
- Global Exchange on Migration & Diversity's Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe: Guidance for Municipalities (2019).