

The role of secondary cities in promoting the inclusion and integration of migrants

Key messages and Recommendations

- **Cities are experiencing unprecedented levels of migrants and displaced persons**

Displacements and migration are contributing to rapid increase in the populations of secondary cities from low-income countries in the African continent. Between 2000 and 2020, secondary cities in Sub-Saharan Africa doubled their population. Whether they are crossing international borders or seeking refuge within their own countries an important number of migrants are now living in urban or semi-urban areas.

- **Cities need the capacity and resources to address migration**

For millions of migrants, cities serve as the first point of arrival, transit hubs and ultimate destinations. While as flagged by the Mayor of Koboko and the IGAD Director for Health and Social development, migration provide a lot of benefits to cities from where they come from and to where they migrate, migration has also put considerable pressure on cities, especially fast-growing secondary cities in developing countries that are already struggling to meet the needs of their populations. Cities require support in the short, medium and long term – from providing food, shelter and healthcare on arrival to housing and subsistence during transit and employment and social integration in following years.

- **New approaches are needed for migration in cities.**

New approaches to migration must enable cities to proactively plan and manage refugees and migrants. The traditional development models based on dedicated delivery of assistance in homogenous camp settings do not work as well in cities. Migrants and refugees living in cities tend to rely more on local communities, markets, and local institutions for their survival and well-being than rural displaced persons. Unlike camps, urban areas allow refugees to live in anonymity and find support from existing networks. Long term solutions need to be applied are people may remain in cities for several years. For this reason, the Global Compact on Migration should dedicate more attention to the role of cities including their financial and technical needs as first point of entry for migrants and people seeking refuge.

- **Advocacy on the Role and Challenges of Secondary Cities in low-income countries**

Much of the urban and migration dialogue focuses on the mega and primary cities when it comes to shaping migration. However, systems of secondary cities in developing regions deserve attention as well. Secondary cities with between one and five million inhabitants are expected to grow by 460 million between 2010 and 2025, compared to a growth of 270 million for megacities. Secondary cities in developing regions, where backlogs and need are greatest and resources are the weakest, are experiencing most of the population growth and are typically a first point of entry for migrants seeking shelter and work while they are ill-prepared and resourced to cope with these developments, let alone leverage them for sustainable, equitable city transformation.

- **Importance of access to adequate data**

The be able to implement the Global Compact on Migration, cities need to access adequate data. A city needs to be able to cater sufficiently for their residents regardless of their status or nationality. For example, an issue in Uganda is that the government provides public services based on the population counted in the national census. The last census is from 2014. This census does not include the additional migrants residing in the city. This creates a lot of pressure on the availability of municipal public services including schools and healthcare.

- **Physical Urban Planning**

Access to reliable data will enable cities to plan better. Much of the current urban expansion is done disorderly, lacking adequate infrastructure, and with serious environmental concerns. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 80% of the residential areas developed over the past 25 years are informal and unplanned. If a city plan well, they can avoid future mayors having challenges with migration.

- **Importance of networking and Regional Exchanges for the Achievement of Global Agendas**

It is in this spirit that with the financial support of the European Union through the emergency trust fund for Africa Cities Alliance, is currently working with seven cities and towns including Koboko, Asosa, Arua, Jigjiga, Kakuma, Gabiley and Borama on a project name: CRRF-Inclusive urban development and mobility to be achieved through regional network and dialogue. This project is providing platform of dialogue to cities for them to learn and exchanges from each other's experience. This project is also supporting secondary cities to strengthen their voices to bring national and international attention to their needs with the support of UCLG-Africa and IGAD. A network of secondary cities in the Horn of Africa is currently emerging from this Action, increasing their international presence, and supporting the implementation of global agendas, including the Global Compact on Migration while always consulting with local population – migrants, refugees and the host communities.

The participants reported that engaging with neighboring cities is key. During a regional exchange in Arua organized by the network in March 2021 the mayors of Arua and Koboko had the opportunity to learn from Ethiopian colleagues about successful urban planning management that they now would like to replicate in their city. Exchanges and networking activities are important for the achievement of the global goals such as the GCM and the GCR as they bring together all actors including the migrants and the host communities.

By supporting secondary cities from the Horn of Africa through regional networking and dialogue, the social, economic and political inclusion of city residents can be improved. The provision of a platform for dialogue across secondary city representatives from the Horn of Africa has the potential to encourage exchanges about local and regional planning, innovation, learning and the adoption of best practices, reducing the risks of rivalry and conflicts and increasing living conditions and opportunities for both, migrants and their host communities.