



Cities as key partners to achieve migration goals

Upcoming Call to Local Action to catalyse bold and principled global action

Migration is an urban phenomenon

Today, 55 percent of the world's population lives in urban areas, including 80 percent of Internally Displaced Persons and two thirds of all refugees¹. Migrants, both internal and international, increasingly move to cities, and in many cases drive an increase in urbanization². The impacts of climate change will also increase urbanization trends. By 2050 up to 1 billion people could be moving either within their countries or across borders for climate-related reasons, and many of these people will end up in cities³. At the same time, cities are on the frontlines of the impact of COVID-19, with 95 percent of cases occurring in urban areas⁴. It is within this context that many cities are working—despite a revenue loss of up to 25 percent⁵—to ensure their policies address the needs of each of their residents, regardless of migration status. Unlike national governments, who have the authority to decide who enters a country and on what basis, cities have the *de facto* responsibility to protect everyone, even when their legal and political mandate to shape migration policy is limited. In practice therefore, and while cities are asked to do more with less, innovative, and collaborative solutions to migration often emerge at local level. Capitalizing on this local energy, the [Mayors Mechanism](#) will launch a Call to Local Action later this year to enable cities to catalyse and inspire global action.

Local action meets global goals

With the adoption of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (GCM) and the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) in December 2018, cities commended the long-awaited holistic and human-centred cooperation framework to manage migration⁶. Most importantly, they welcomed the acknowledgement of both Compacts —through the 'whole-of-government' principle—that migration policies will only work if they are grounded in local realities and if national governments and global actors consider cities as key partners.

With mandates – both implicit and explicit – to ensure the wellbeing of all city residents without exception, 150 city leaders also endorsed the [Marrakesh Mayors Declaration](#) (MMD) in December 2018, committing to implement the two Global Compacts in union and calling for the full and formal

¹ UNHCR (2016). [The Power of Cities](#).

² IOM (2015). [World Migration Report](#)

³ IOM (2008). [Migration and Climate Change](#).

⁴ UN-Habitat (2020). [Key Facts and Data](#).

⁵ UN Secretary-General (July 2020). [Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World](#).

⁶ Ms. Valérie Plante, Mayor of Montreal (2018). [Statement at the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the GCM \(time: 1h22'45''\)](#).

recognition of the crucial role of cities in the implementation and review of both Compacts. Following that political commitment and responding to the Mayors Mechanism [2019 Call to Action](#), four cities (Bristol, Milan, São Paulo and Strasbourg) pledged to implement both Compacts. These pledges include actions such as:

- Develop and execute a Municipal Plan for Immigrants, in collaboration with a Municipal Council of immigrants, which places human rights at its heart and ensures policy coherence across city departments. ([São Paulo pledge](#), contributing to the GCM whole-of-government principle and the GCM objectives).
- Establish a local communications campaign, promoting inclusive local identity and preventing discrimination and xenophobia. ([Bristol pledge](#), contributing to GCM Objective 16 and 17)
- Mobilise national, regional and global city networks to raise the bar by sharing pragmatic, human-centred solutions in cities and advocating for inclusive migration policies. ([Strasbourg pledge](#), contributing to GCM Objective 23)
- Strengthen city services to better protect migrant communities against sexual and gender-based violence. ([Milan pledge](#), contributing to GCM Objective 7 and 15)

While these pledges illustrate concrete city commitment, cities, during the GCM regional reviews and at the 2021 [GFMD Summit](#), mentioned several hurdles for them to effectively contribute:

- Often, a lack of – or poorly conceived - local-national policy coordination mechanisms, as well as a lack of (access to) disaggregated data, hampers the ability of local and national governments to manage migration effectively, especially in times of crisis.
- Cities frequently lack adequate legal and budgetary mandates to protect migrants, thereby straining already limited capacities and putting migrants and communities at risk.
- Despite important developments, such as the inclusion of city actors in the steering committee of the [Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund](#), their participation in the [UN Network on Migration](#) working groups, and the setup of a city-led [Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response](#), cities lack access to international funding schemes and technical support, which makes implementing global commitments a challenge.



Ms. Valérie Plante, Mayor of Montreal, at the 5th Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development in 2018, where city leaders adopted the Marrakesh Mayors Declaration. Copyright: United Cities and Local Governments.

Call to Local Action and the road to the International Migration Review Forum

Within this context and building on the work of the cities that pledged, the Mayors Mechanism will relaunch a Call to Local Action later this year to further promote, showcase and support such city-led solutions in favour of human rights-based migration governance and to illustrate the hurdles cities face. This Call will also increase and streamline city access into formal stocktaking and review procedures, including the upcoming [International Migration Review Forum](#) (IMRF). Through this effort, the Mayors Mechanism hopes that States and multilateral actors increasingly recognise the transformative impact cities have on migration governance and support efforts to unlock direct resources and forge new partnerships.

Lastly, to achieve global goals, city participation must be meaningful. There are many ways this can take shape. For example, and with an eye to the upcoming IMRF, this may mean recognizing locally elected city leaders as distinct from civil society stakeholders, providing spaces for meaningful exchange between national and local governments and encouraging city-specific reviews of their local GCM implementation efforts. As the UN prepares to redefine how it works with cities to [reinvigorate inclusive multilateralism](#) – which COVID-19 has shown us is now more important than ever –, the IMRF poses an important opportunity to spearhead this thinking and lead by example.

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The [Mayors Mechanism](#) is co-steered by [United Cities and Local Governments](#), [The Mayors Migration Council](#) and the [International Organization for Migration](#)

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