POLICY BRIEF

Migration as an opportunity for urban development

Summary

Despite enjoying unprecedented recognition as key agents of migration governance, cities today continue to struggle to implement effective solutions in the field of migrant inclusion. As the leading European intergovernmental organisation on migration, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) sets out to address this gap by providing evidence, know-how and effective partnership instruments to make a marked contribution to migration governance around the globe. The below recommendations on how to overcome major hurdles in addressing migration as a local development opportunity draw on over two decades’ work of ICMPD in the field of migration and findings from its Mediterranean City to City Migration project (MC2CM) project.

Context

The Mediterranean City to City Migration project (MC2CM) contributes to improved migration governance at local level in cities in the Southern Neighbourhood and Europe. Since 2015, the project implemented by ICMPD in partnership with UCLG and UN-Habitat, has involved the cities of Amman, Beirut, Lisbon, Lyon, Madrid, Tangiers, Tunis, Turin and Vienna in building knowledge, nurturing dialogue and engaging in action. It is funded by the European Commission and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

MC2CM builds upon the principle that, as the government level closest to citizens, cities are well-placed to identify the challenges related to mobile populations and set out strategies to address these in a way that reflect the needs and concerns of the host communities. Furthermore, in this context, migration represents an opportunity as long as it can be anchored to a wider strategic process of urban development. A better management of migration can lead to the improvement of urban life quality for all through, among others: increased offer of affordable housing, education programmes, access to rights and services, infrastructure and employment opportunities.

MC2CM takes place in the framework of the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM), an informal consultative platform between migration officials in countries of origin, transit and destination along the migration routes in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. As such, MC2CM is the first of its kind linking regional cooperation and urban networks in the area of migration and it aims to support better local level migration policies in participating cities.
The information provided in this brief is drawn from extensive research and experience amassed by the MC2CM project through the compilation of 9 City Migration Profiles and stakeholder groups, peer to peer learnings, events and a mapping and analysis of existing city networks that served as the basis for the development of the MC2CM network.

Main Findings
In order for cities to capitalise on the potential of migration, some initial considerations need to be acknowledged:

• Legislative framework, regulated at a regional and/or national level, matters in particular when it comes to the provision of rights and entitlements to migrants on the ground. Too often cities receive groups that may have common basic needs but that are fragmented in the rights and entitlements they can enjoy. This reality often encumbers concerted interventions on the ground.

• In some instances, highly centralised governments have hindered the proactive involvement of local administration to act as agents of solutions in the field of migration and inclusion.

• There is a lack of readily available, comparative data on migration at local level.

• The division between origin, transit and destination countries is becoming more artificial, with cities attracting increasing number of migrants. This phenomenon is coupled with growing urbanisation and establishment of wider urban structures such as metropolises where migrants congregate, a reality which solicits specific attention.

• The discourse on migration can have a detrimental effect on social cohesion. There is a perceived competition for resources among local populations that hinders some of the actions targeting migrant populations in host communities. This challenge represents a major barrier to advancing in the field of migration at local level.

• There is a long tradition of urban cooperation in different policy areas and a high value placed on partnership as an effective tool to address migration policy challenges. Various city networks dealing with migration and integration have developed in Europe in the last twenty years. Notwithstanding, spanning beyond Europe, the most notable experience of migration networks (Regional Consultative Processes or Regional Migration Dialogues) have been developed exclusively at the state level.

• Evaluations of both Regional Migration Dialogues and city networks show that the dialogue and sharing good practices (between countries and cities) contribute to the improvement of policymaking.

Recommendations
Some promising practices and instruments are already in place or in development to set out to address the aforementioned challenges. However, settings such as the Global Mayoral Forum provide a unique opportunity to join efforts, align priorities and create the momentum necessary to address shortcomings and increase efficiency and impact of interventions on the ground. Some recommendations to this effect are:

• An open dialogue needs to be established to disentangle the subsidiarity principle which governs areas of responsibility of national, regional and local governments in respective areas of human rights, social inclusion and discrimination to determine the right level to address these areas and set out strategies to tackle gaps in responsibility.
• Building evidence is a key element of effective migration governance. Collection and compilation of existing data on migration, disaggregated not only by characteristics of target group but also by local geographic regions can provide a better insight into the local realities of migration and the solutions to challenges on the ground. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators for integration and social cohesion must be accounted for in the evaluation of longitudinal policy implementation.

• As the level of government closest to citizens, cities can play a direct role in dispelling myths, stereotypes and promoting a balanced narrative on migration – rooted in citizen’s everyday experiences. At the same time, an open and honest debate is necessary, addressing the real challenges that migration, if not adequately channelled, can raise, including social tensions, strain on services, rise of extremism and others.

• Given the complex reality of migration, cities must continue to build upon exchanges and joint learning, including learning from one another’s mistakes, to set out effective policy tools to address the stark reality that they will have to prepare for receiving both migrants intending to stay for a few weeks, months or years as well as migrants who will be settling in.

• Complementarity between global and regional migration frameworks including the Agenda 2030, the New Urban Agenda, Global Compacts on Safe, Regular and Orderly migration and for Refugees, the European Agenda on Migration and others must be guaranteed. Similarly, synergies and coordination among operational programmes on the ground must also be ensured, particularly in the light of the counterproductive effect fragmented approaches can have on social cohesion in host communities.

• Policy coherence must be sought among migration and social inclusion approaches and the enactment of other policy areas including security, finance and others that may have detrimental impact on equality and perception of migration which are root causes of prejudice and exclusion. Furthermore, inter-governmental cooperation among policy areas such as employment, education, health, economic growth and others where migrants can have a stake is an essential component for effective migrant integration. This dimension needs to be communicated more globally in discussions on migration at all levels.

• Multi-level cooperation among local, regional and national level is also essential to ensure policy coherence and enable effective integration and inclusion to materialise. Existing Dialogues and regional processes can serve as a source of inspiration for new migration actors to gather in the spirit of true partnership and cooperation.

• Meaningful partnerships among public bodies with the private sector should be explored as a way to address areas that may be out of the purview of public intervention which have a direct impact on migrant inclusion.

About ICMPD:
The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is an international organisation founded in 1993 to promote innovative, comprehensive and sustainable migration policies and to function as a service exchange mechanism for governments and organisations. ICMPD provides expertise and support to several Regional Dialogues on migration and asylum issues. www.icmpd.org