Welcoming Cities for Refugees and Migrants: Promoting Inclusion and Protecting Rights
POLICY BRIEF
Session 2: Local-level implementation of the SDGs in partnership with national governments

Summary

Local authorities are at the front lines of refugee and migrant reception and inclusion. Migration today is markedly urban, and this reality is shaping the social, political, economic and cultural developments in cities. In this light, UNESCO launched the initiative Welcoming cities for refugees and migrants: promoting inclusion and protecting rights, in collaboration with the Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation (Greece) and in partnership with the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR). Its aim was to provide support and guidance to city authorities for effective, holistic and inclusive governance of migration at the local level. The initiative is conducted within the framework of UNESCO’s International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR, which promotes international cooperation among its more than 500 member cities in seven regional and national coalitions geared towards strengthening advocacy for global solidarity and collaboration, and promote inclusive urban development free from all forms of discrimination.

Context

In recent years, European countries faced a dramatic increase in the number of refugees arriving in irregular situations, and the number of asylum applications has doubled since 2014. However, Europe is home to only 6% of the global refugee population, a much lower figure than other regions. For the majority, migration was a necessity, not an option. They crossed international borders to survive and in every step of their journey have been faced with tremendous challenges, including prejudice, stereotypes and different forms of discrimination.

In such context, mayors and local authorities, as the level of government closest to the people, have the potential and the responsibility to create an enabling environment for inclusion, facilitating access to rights for both women and men as vectors of positive change in urban areas and for promoting social cohesion. Local governments have the instruments through which they can improve the reception and integration of migrants and refugees in cities, tackling discrimination, abuse and exploitation. However, knowledge and capacities should be enhanced and financial resources made available to develop effective city-based responses maximising the benefits of human mobility. Commitments to human rights standards require translation into local polices and programmes to ensure their
fulfilment, as local authorities are subsidiary duty-bearers for the human rights within their fields of competence.

A first key output of the UNESCO/Vardinoyannis Foundation/ECCAR initiative was the publication *Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants.* It presents the findings of a comprehensive research on issues, trends and approaches with a focus on Europe, drawing on input by 22 European Cities. The publication also put forward a set of principles for municipal action in favour of migrants’ inclusion. Currently, work is focusing on the development of an operational handbook to assist and empower city authorities and other concerned stakeholders to foster a welcoming urban governance agenda. At a next stage, UNESCO will seek to replicate the research in other regions in cooperation with concerned regional/national coalitions.

**Main findings of city responses to the survey of the Welcoming Cities initiative**

- Most cities reported foreign-born populations of 16% to 40% of their totals.
- The refugee/migrant population is difficult to pin down because many remain undocumented.
- With the exception of Liege, all cities participating in the survey indicated increases in the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers since 2015.
- Cities reported receiving between 400 and 7,500 refugees and asylum seekers in 2015.
- Migration is crucial to sustaining the world of work in Europe, and over the next 15 years, the majority of the world’s countries and populations will experience a decline in their work forces.
- Discrimination has a double, indeed multiple impacts on refugee and migrant women. Most job opportunities for women migrants are in unregulated sectors, such as agriculture, domestic work and services.
- Refugees and migrants usually pay more in taxes than they receive in tax-supported services.
- Several cities reported that they established specific policy and/or administrative frameworks to address reception of refugees and migrants, as well as integration.

**Recommendations**

The *Welcoming Cities for Refugees and Migrants* initiative proposed a framework checklist highlighting the main features of the city governance agenda on welcoming and integrating refugees and migrants:

1. A deliberate, values- and rights-based approach to city governance, by definition welcoming and inclusive, should be explicitly announced in formal city policy.
2. Services for all, universal and equal access for migrants and refugees to basic human and social services, without discrimination on any basis.

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*The full text of the Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants publication is available at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002465/246558e.pdf

Twenty-two ECCAR member cities across eleven countries provided detailed responses. These were: Athens Barcelona Berlin Bologna Darmstadt Erlangen Esch-sur-Alzette Geneva Ghent Graz Helsingborg Karlsruhe Lausanne Liège Malmö Metz Nancy Rotterdam Soest Stockholm Uppsala and Vienna.*

4. A dedicated and ample ‘campaign’ against discrimination, racism and xenophobia, aimed at promoting equality of opportunities and outcomes for all migrants and refugees. An integral part of such campaign would be the mainstreaming of gender equality perspectives across local policies and practices.

5. Ensuring that the ‘right to the city’ by deliberate, comprehensive measures for inclusion and integration, recognizing migrants and refugees as fellow ‘denizens’, social actors and political agents engaged in creating opportunities and realizing solutions.

6. Celebrating culture and diversity, recognizing cities as genuine places of diversity, accounting for their dynamism and offering best prospects for future development.

7. Incorporating seven fundamental components for effective city governance: comprehensive knowledge base, rights-based and gender-specific legislation, deliberate policy, interdepartmental coordination, designated focal points, urban planning, and evaluation.

8. Engagement of all stakeholders in the advisory, decision-making and implementation bodies of city governance, notably the social partner economic actors, migrants and refugees, civil society organizations, and social service actors.

9. Multi-level governance, dialogue and cooperation, national and local, towards obtaining the political ‘space’ and support for cities welcoming and integrating migrants and refugees.

10. Finances for services to all and social cohesion – as well as maintaining the work force – must be reflected in allocations for focused programmes, targeted outreach, trained staff and specialized administrative departments as well as needed infrastructure.

11. Media and public relations work with deliberate strategy on migration and migrants, is essential to supportive public attitudes and gaining constituent support.

12. Accountability at all levels, by all actors, is essential to ensuring welcoming cities for refugees and migrants.

In addition, the initiative suggested the following actions to enhance the welcoming cities for refugees and migrants agenda:

I. Facilitating networking, dialogue, cooperation and mutual support through focused consultations, conferences, workshops and trainings, continuing the role and activity of ECCAR;

II. Enhancing the knowledge base by undertaking research leading towards the production of a comprehensive framework guidance handbook to support local authorities and all other stakeholders;

III. Encouraging continuous exchanges between cities on principles, policies, practices and experiences on migration and cities.