



MEDITERRANEAN CITY-TO-CITY MIGRATION



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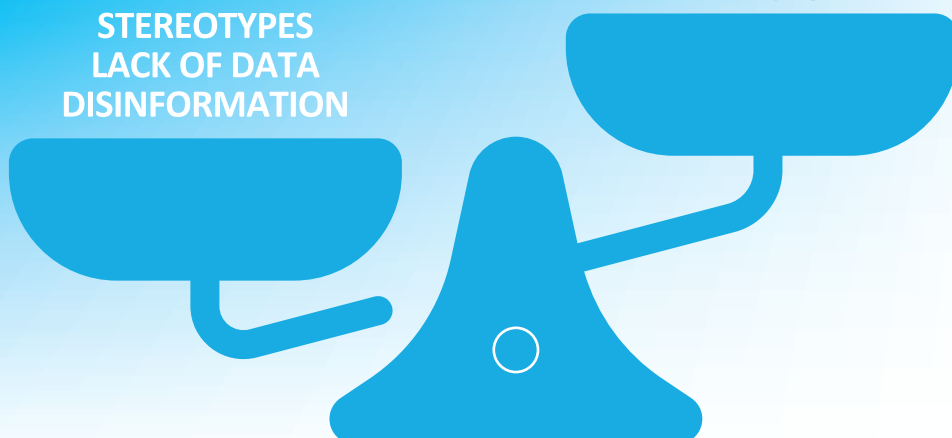
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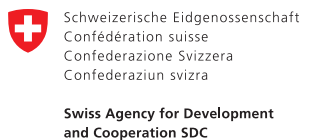


COMMUNICATION ON MIGRATION: REBALANCING THE NARRATIVE TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

MYTHS
STEREOTYPES
LACK OF DATA
DISINFORMATION

FACTS





COMMUNICATION ON MIGRATION: REBALANCING THE NARRATIVE TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE





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Acknowledgements:

This report benefitted from the contributions of MC2CM city focal points and partners, especially the Municipality of Seville and the Andalousian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI) who co-hosted this event. We are particularly grateful for the contributions of Francisco Guerrero, Secretary of Migration of FAMSI and Mayor of Campillos, and Juan Espadas, Mayor of Seville. We would like also to thank Dr. James Dennison from the Migration Policy Centre and European University Institute, PorCausa foundation representative Lucila Rodríguez-Alarcón, journalist Leila Berratto, Paul Butcher and Alberto Horst Neidhart from the European Policy Center, Guillermo Buteau from Andalusian Association of Public Local & Community Radios and Televisions, and Angel Madero Arias from Andalucía Acoge as well as Yasmine Ourihane from “We Belong”, for their input.

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union (EU) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of EU or SDC.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

ABOUT MC2CM

Migration is a defining feature of urbanisation. Cities are places where people come together to live, work and find opportunities. It is also in the city where the reality of social and economic accommodation of newcomers and their interaction with host community takes place.

In this context, the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration project (MC2CM) contributes to improved rights-based migration governance in cities. Through dialogue, knowledge and action, MC2CM anchors migration governance to a process of urban planning, promoting a realistic and fair narrative on migration.



DIALOGUE

Nurturing dialogue between cities and relevant stakeholders through peer-to-peer learning and exchanges



KNOWLEDGE

Supporting knowledge generation and development of evidence-based approaches



ACTION

Providing sustainable solutions and testing tools to address migration-related challenges and opportunities

Developed in the framework of the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM), MC2CM is anchored in a network of Euro-Mediterranean cities. It is funded by the European Union and co-financed by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and is implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

More information at:

- icmpd.org/mc2cm
- [@urban_migration](https://twitter.com/urban_migration)
- [Mediterranean City to City Migration \(MC2CM\)](#)

GLOBAL AGENDAS

Since 2015, more than 20 cities and local governments have joined the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2CM) project, steered by the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN-Habitat. Aligning to the Sustainable Development Goal 17 (**SDG 17**) to *strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*, the MC2CM project aims at mainstreaming migration in urban governance by promoting evidence-based policies and transforming the narrative of migration. City-to-City knowledge transfer and cooperation lay at the basis of this project, which relies on decentralized cooperation as a tool for development.

One of the key targets of the MC2CM project is to **foster effective urban migration governance** in order to *facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility*, which aligns to **SDG Target 10.7** and the corresponding objective 23 of the Global Compact on Migration (**GCM**). Thematically, the MC2CM project focuses on issues such as social cohesion, socioeconomic inclusion, access to basic services and intercultural dialogue, which are also targeted by the **SDGs 3, 4, 8, 11** and **16**.

The joint City-to-City partnerships and programmes particularly focus on accelerating local efforts to advance four priority objectives of the GCM. The priority objectives 7 - *to address and reduce vulnerabilities: safeguarding migrants' human rights and protection against exploitation* corresponds to **SDG target 10.7**. The priority objective 15 - *to provide migrants with safe access to essential services* corresponds to **SDGs 3** and **4**. The priority objectives 16 - *to empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion* and no. 17 - *to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration* correspond to the targets of **SDGs 11** and **16**.

Another relevant thematic focus addresses migrant women vulnerabilities and needs, aiming to contribute to **SDG 5** - *to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*.

The MC2CM peer-learning event on 'Communication on Migration: Rebalancing the Narrative to Strengthen Local Governance', conducted in June 2020, provided cities with a platform to discuss concrete strategies to rebalance migration narratives in order to strengthen local migration governance, foster social cohesion and increase the quality of life for all inhabitants. This outcome would contribute in particular to **SDGs 11** and **16**.



ABOUT THE REPORT

This Thematic Learning Report draws on the results of the regional event of the MC2CM project held online and hosted by the Municipality of Seville and the Andalousian Fund of Muniaplities for International Solidarity (FAMSI) from 15 to 18 June 2020 . The digital event convened 82 participants from the Euro-Mediterranean region and beyond, including representatives of 23 cities, 5 local authorities’ network, NGOs, International Organisations, journalists, policy analysts and experts. The interactive sessions tackled rebalancing migration narratives for improved urban migration governance.¹

¹ See the best-of video of the event online here: <https://bit.ly/2F9VlKq>
The programme, background document and list of participants to the event are available here: <https://bit.ly/3ltW6Ob>

Over the course of its second implementation phase (2018-2021) MC2CM produces Thematic Learning Reports, which not only capture but also ensure a broader dissemination of the findings of its thematic peer-learning events, providing sustainable local solutions within and beyond the project. Thematic Learning Reports cite the conclusions and recommendations stemming from the dialogue and include relevant examples and tools for local actors to draw upon in considering action on the selected theme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The prevailing narratives around migration are too often polarized and produce a debate that underestimates the complexity of human mobility and is neither pragmatic nor moored in evidence. While representing a small share of migration realities, irregular migration flows receive a large share of the media attention and thus form part of the general perception and narrative surrounding migration.

“The prevailing unbalanced narrative, which is rather negative towards migration, must be addressed by sharing evidence-based perspectives. Are research and objective data on the effects of migration enough to reverse the preconceptions and recent resentments of local communities? What has been the local impact of partnerships in this regard? What role do migrant communities play in achieving this? These are the questions that we must think about together and that will stimulate discussion.”

Simon Giger, Head Global Programme Migration and Development Division, SDC

“The diversity brought by migration is silenced by the usual media channels and presented as a threat, which for me is the key issue. This is where I believe our current challenge lies. Local governments, councils and local authorities are a means of defence against such media coverage and the distortion that exists within private commercial media about migration.”

Francisco Guerrero, Mayor of Campillos and Secretary of Migration, Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI)

Such narratives have significant implications at local level where the reality of migration plays out. As anchor points of globalisation and agents of social cohesion, the success of migration policies hinges in large part on the ability of local authorities to rebalance these narratives.

“If migration policy does not work in cities, it does not work at all.”

Emma Udwin, Head of Task Force on Migration Assistance to Neighbouring Countries, European Commission

COVID-19 has intensified and generated new challenges for local authorities when it comes to tackling migration and communicating about it. When confronted with the pandemic, host communities recognize the migrant workers’ presence as constructive and essential: from hospital cleaners, transport workers, food delivery agents, as well as frontline doctors and nurses. However, the pandemic has also awoken deep fears and subjected millions of people to isolation, unemployment and economic insecurity. Amid this uncertainty, the pandemic and its aftermath may be a fertile ground for a rise in xenophobia, hate speech and racism. In this sense, whilst on the one hand there is an opportunity to shed light on migrants’ contribution during the crisis, there is also a risk that due to rising fears and anti-migrant sentiment, which the delicate balance required to attain cohesion may be at peril.

“If there is one enriching part of the dynamics of city life, it is the exchange of cultures, the exchange of people, no matter where they come from, who decide to live together, who decide to share an area, their lives, their present and future, or their families’ and who therefore constitute a model of society that is open and inclusive.”

Juan Espadas, Mayor of Seville

As the emergency is multi-faceted and unprecedented, it calls for responses from municipal authorities, as well as governments at the regional, national and supra-national level. Equally, shaping effective migration policies requires a multi-level cooperation, dialogue and communication. To do so, local and national authorities should work towards closing the gap between public perceptions, and evidence-based migration narratives.

“Migration is natural. Unfortunately, that is not how we describe it in our day-to-day. This pandemic has challenged us in every aspect of our lives and fear, which is a very negative influence for policy development, has become even more regular. It is important that, as a network, we make the best out of the opportunities that MC2CM provides to exchange, debate and share data on the benefits of urban migration.”

Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG

This Thematic Learning Report seeks to shed light on opportunities and challenges for Mediterranean cities in rebalancing the narrative on migration, taking into account the impact of the pandemic. The report also provided recommendations that could be taken into account to overcome migration-related challenges:

- The COVID-19 pandemic presents risks, but also opportunities to rebalance the narrative around migration. These opportunities include highlighting the essential role many migrants have played in the coronavirus response and ensuing recovery. Countering disinformation in that regard is key, especially as the pandemic has also become a fertile ground for negative narratives, which seek to scapegoat migrants.
- Cities across the region do not all possess the needed capacities and knowledge around migration. Support is needed both in terms of training but also tools. Without accurate data, a tailored approach is not possible. Collecting data and portraying a correct picture on the local migration context, in addition to capacity building, which entails making effective communication a priority, especially in times of crisis, are essential tools.
- Rebalancing migration narratives by conducting trainings which tackle values-based communications is essential. Values-based communication most likely brings out sympathy, particularly if the values align with those of the targeted public. Along the same lines, communication strategies related to migration should be followed by impact assessment conducted by the city, to fully comprehend their effects on narratives and perceptions. Civil society organisations can work with cities and play a critical supporting role, providing capacity and tapping international resources that may be unavailable for direct support to local governments.
- Civil society organisations can work with cities and play a critical supporting role, providing capacity and tapping international resources that may be unavailable for direct support to local governments.
- Cities are keen to engage with international organisations directly, as well as through support of national governments. Regular exchanges between international and municipal stakeholders is essential in identifying and implementing effective cooperation.
- The Mediterranean has been and will be shaped by migration. Public campaigns need to reflect the normality and entirety of migration and mobility in ways that move past narratives of crisis. Thus, building for the long term, by highlighting that migration is not a crisis, but a human condition, and training staff, practitioners and media outlets to shed the light on the benefits of migration, is fundamental.

“Communicating on migration is very important to us because a distorted narrative impairs policymaking. Local governments are in a unique position to challenge negative perceptions and foster a balanced migration narrative. ICMPD is committed to continue working on the issue of migration narratives and communication at all levels.”

Julien Simon, Regional Coordinator for the Mediterranean, ICMPD

1. THE NARRATIVE ON MIGRATION

While the politics of migration can often appear volatile, public attitudes in much of the Euro-Mediterranean region are actually stable. The volatility can be found in public opinion, which unlike underlying attitudes, shifts in response to short term events. **This volatility is exacerbated by narratives that appeal to values and identities and provoke an emotional reaction.**

As the perceived importance of immigration and irregular migration have risen in recent years², fringe experiences have occupied the public discourse, polarizing public opinion³. This is a vicious circle Migration is frequently presented as “out of control”⁴. Irregular migration, which makes up a tiny proportion of actual mobility and has been in decline in the European Union for the last four years, still dominates the discussion, despite the downward trend in overall asylum applications in comparison to the peak of migration pressure. The notion of migration perceived as a threat to host communities has become the norm across much of the region. The absence of real, majority, lived experience of human mobility distorts the narrative and policy responses on an issue that affects millions of people.

Due to their proximity to citizens and voters, local officials might be tempted to avoid communicating on such heated issues. However, **communication is unavoidable** and understanding perceptions and ways to address these, can help avoid conflict and unlock the full potential of migration at local level.

² [A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe](#) Dennison and Geddes

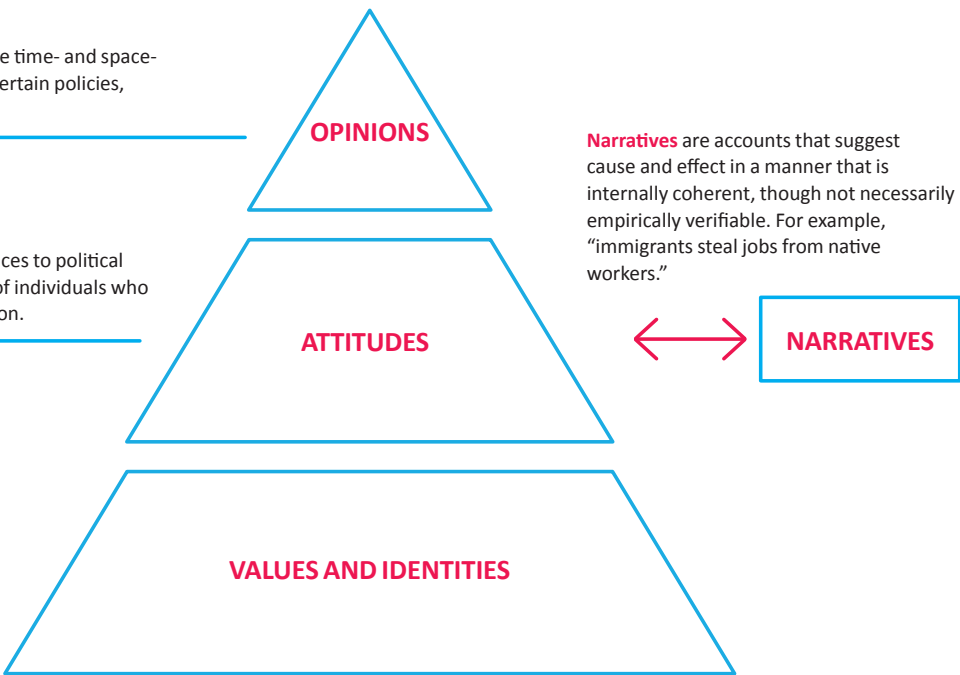
³ UNHCR: [Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries](#)

⁴ ODI, Chatham House [Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants](#)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ATTITUDES, OPINIONS AND NARRATIVES?

Public opinions usually refers to more time- and space-specific issues, such as approval for certain policies, parties or politicians.

Public attitudes are general preferences to political issues. For example, the proportion of individuals who respond being in favour of immigration.



Narratives are accounts that suggest cause and effect in a manner that is internally coherent, though not necessarily empirically verifiable. For example, “immigrants steal jobs from native workers.”

1.1 CONTEXT AND LOCAL ATTITUDES TO MIGRATION

“The more we work at a local level, the more the migration narrative will change and become more positive.”
Chahrazed Laghouan, University Professor, Higher Institute of Technological Studies of Djerba

“Migrants have shaped the history of Tunisia. Jewish, French, Italian and Maltese migrants have come here. This sequence of events help Tunisians and local citizens see migration and the integration of migrants under a positive light.”
Imen Ouardani, Vice-Mayor of Sousse

Most authoritative pan-European surveys (e.g. European Social Survey (ESS) between 2002 and 2018) show that attitudes towards all types of immigration in most European countries have actually become markedly more positive, or at least less negative, in recent years⁵. This also holds for a range of attitudinal types, including preferences to types of immigration, perceived effects of migration, and desired migration policy.

⁵ [European Social Survey 2012-2018](#)

The same broad stability and slight decline in negativity is visible in Eurobarometer surveys⁶ which have been asking the same two questions since 2014: “Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you. Immigration of people from outside the EU/other EU member states.”

⁶ [Eurobarometer Standard Survey](#)

Across North Africa there are similar trends, albeit with some crucial differences related to the labour market. Arab Barometer surveys⁷ on public attitudes across North Africa and the Mediterranean (as well as Jordan) show large majorities are either positive or at worst indifferent to immigration. This is reflected in the low salience that immigration is given as an issue in all the countries surveyed. The main anti-immigration trigger is access to employment where there is near unanimity that native citizens should be given priority.

⁷ ICMPD: [Impact of Public Attitudes to Migration on the Political Environment in the Euromed Region](#)

Why does the political discourse around migration appear volatile when underlying attitudes are stable? The answer is suggested by an ICMPD research in 2018⁸. The study shows how the perceived importance of the issue of immigration has risen across the Euro-Mediterranean region and favoured the rise of anti-immigration votes and parties. In spite of this, research highlights the fact that attitudes towards migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region remained stable in recent years. While the perceived importance of the question of immigration is volatile, attitudes towards immigration are not becoming more negative.

⁸ ICMPD: [Public attitudes on migration: rethinking how people perceive migration](#)

The rise of anti-immigrant forces such as the radical right does not track to increases in anti-immigration attitudes, it closely follows increases in the perceived importance of immigration during Europe’s so-called “migration crisis” (Dennison and Geddes, 2018). Anti-immigration attitudes, when triggered, can dictate voting choices.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to place public health and the economy ahead of immigration at the top of the agenda for most voters. But opportunities remain for anti-immigration populists to feed narratives that demonise migrants or falsely claim that they are vectors for the spread of the virus. The factors that condition attitudes toward migration are complex, but understandable. They include four broad categories: psychological, socialization, attitudinal and contextual. The first of these relates to personal foundations, such as values and morality.

But the last of these is particularly relevant to local and regional government actors as factors include: neighbourhood safety; contact with immigrants; media influence; local immigration rates; perception of immigrant levels.



1.2 CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATING ON MIGRATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Migration can appear daunting as a topic for local authorities to address. The challenges cut both ways: there are capacity limits on the side of authorities and access issues for migrants themselves. Resources and capacity vary enormously across the Euro-Mediterranean region. **But communication is unavoidable and understanding mechanisms and perceptions can avoid conflict and prevent negative impacts on social cohesion**, while unlocking the undoubted benefits of migration.

a. LIMITED CAPACITY AND EXPERTISE

- Working on **communication on migration** benefits strongly from specialised input, knowledge and skill sets that city authorities do not always have.
- **The basis for good decisions are good data.** Cities across the region do not have uniform access to up-to-date information on the migration context. This is essentially a tools issue.
- A shortage of resources and capacity can hinder the development of effective communication strategies, some of which require the **commitment of time and financial investment**.

b. LACK OF ACCESS

Migrants, and in particular new arrivals, do not always know how to access information that might help them adapt even when it is available. This is especially true for vulnerable groups who do not share a language with the host community, or who have irregular status and may therefore be wary of attempting to access services. This is in part a knock-on effect of the shortage of capacity identified previously, which complicates the design of relevant services for immigrants.

c. DISINFORMATION

“Misinformation and myths about migrants have been circulating for years. This is why we work with associations representing migrants to share accurate data and information about integration. Together we are fighting such misinformation while waiting for a comprehensive national policy to counter this phenomenon.”
Wajdi Aydi, Deputy Mayor in charge of decentralized cooperation and external relations, Municipality of Sfax

“We hope to create a different ecosystem through proactive people who, firstly, limit the spread of false information by not sharing it in the first place. Secondly, by preventing misinformation to reach their close connections. Thirdly, by encouraging sending constructive rather than destructive messages. Messages that are based on reality, objective data and true information.”
Ángel Madero, Social Educator, Andalucía Acoge

Local governments face organised, motivated opposition to an evidence-based rebalancing of the migration narrative. The COVID-19 crisis has seen an acceleration of disinformation that has come to be known as the “infodemic”⁹. The purpose of such disinformation is to sow panic and distrust. There is fertile ground around the migration debate for stoking both panic and distrust.

⁹ NPR: [U.N. Chief Targets ‘Dangerous Epidemic Of Misinformation’ On Coronavirus](#)

Malicious anti-migrant rhetoric has long been a central theme within extremist mobilisation globally and a mainstay of disinformation campaigns. Anti-migrant and far-right networks in the Euro-Mediterranean region and beyond are exploiting the COVID-19 situation, as they would do with any type of crisis, to spread disinformation targeting migrants, refugees and other vulnerable populations on and offline. The pandemic has seen migrants falsely cast as a threat to public health.

d. 'FAKE NEWS' AND 'DISINFORMATION

“Anyone can, through social media, download any kind of information connect it to any topic that provokes division and confusion among people. We should use the latest technology to counter this.”

Nancy Al Qa'Qaa, Agricultural engineer, Project Manager, Greater Amman Municipality

“We have a group formed with third-sector organisations and with NGOs called Puerto Real Solidaria. We developed a large campaign to signal smear content on Facebook, we published videos and we interviewed a migrant person who has been living in our city for many years now in order to get closer to reality. Reality is the same for everyone.”

Josefa M. Crespo Ruiz, Cooperation Technician, Municipality of Puerto Real

The term ‘fake news’ may be widely recognised in public debate but academic and policy sources generally advise against it, instead recommending ‘disinformation’. While misinformation refers to material that is simply erroneous, for example due to error or ignorance, [disinformation implies an intentional, malicious attempt to mislead](#) ¹⁰.

¹⁰ EPC [Disinformation and democracy: The home front in the information war](#)

Social media, which has only grown in importance during COVID-19 lockdowns, has been the main amplifier of disinformation. Typically, the tools used are automated software programmes (‘bots’) which spread messages across social media platforms in ways which are hard to detect for ordinary users, who in turn pick them up and further share them.

SOME NARRATIVES INCLUDE:

- ✗ Claims that migrants specifically ignore lockdown rules and asylum seekers are violently resisting quarantine;
- ✗ Conspiracy theories that undermine efforts to deal with the crisis and its growth, including those disputing the reality of the virus and its impacts on health and life, which are particularly prevalent in closed groups such as on Telegram;
- ✗ False claims that the virus was engineered or spread deliberately by rival state actors or even airlines are stoking xenophobia in the Middle East, for instance the “Qatar is Corona” hashtag;
- ✗ Suggestions that migration routes, in particular along the Greek-Turkish border, are acting as a vector for the virus to spread;
- ✗ Speculation that immigrant and minority communities in major cities are using the virus as an opportunity to riot;
- ✗ Claims that migrants will use the pandemic as an opportunity to ‘invade Europe’.

The feedback loop between viral disinformation and local and national politics is accelerating constantly. It is visible in a political landscape, where populist actors actively adopt talking points, conspiracy theories and even policy directly from extremist actors.

All categories of migrants are potentially vulnerable to aggressive disinformation campaigns, even frontline migrant health-workers, who have been celebrated in some cities but shunned in others as potential spreaders of the virus.

In the Euro-Mediterranean, irregular migrants are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19-related disinformation since they are already subject to overly simplistic media framing. Under lockdown, the governments of Italy and Malta closed their ports in response to the virus, and the government of Greece has carried out lockdowns in asylum seeker reception centres long after they were lifted for the general population.

However, irregular crossings in the Mediterranean continue as do tensions over how to handle the people rescued. Coronavirus clusters at refugee facilities have been brought in from outside visitors.

Nonetheless, disinformation campaigns threaten to inflame this highly sensitive situation, where human rights, security concerns, border control and the essential trust needed to sustain third country cooperation are all in play.

e. POLITICS AND PRIORITIES

Communication requires resources that were already scarce before the challenges the pandemic has presented. The allocation of scarce resources may see local authorities choose to invest in other needs or de-prioritize communication.

National debates on migration can often ignore the realities that cities already face. The denial of services to irregular migrants may be popular at the national level, while the consequences are keenly felt in municipalities where these people continue to reside.

“Context matters, you (local authorities) know better than anyone else. Only you are immersed in the everyday life of your community. Disinformation creates a disconnect between perceptions of migration and the everyday reality. You know about shared communal living and can bring forward this alternative narrative.”

Alberto-Horst Neidhardt, Analyst, European Policy Centre

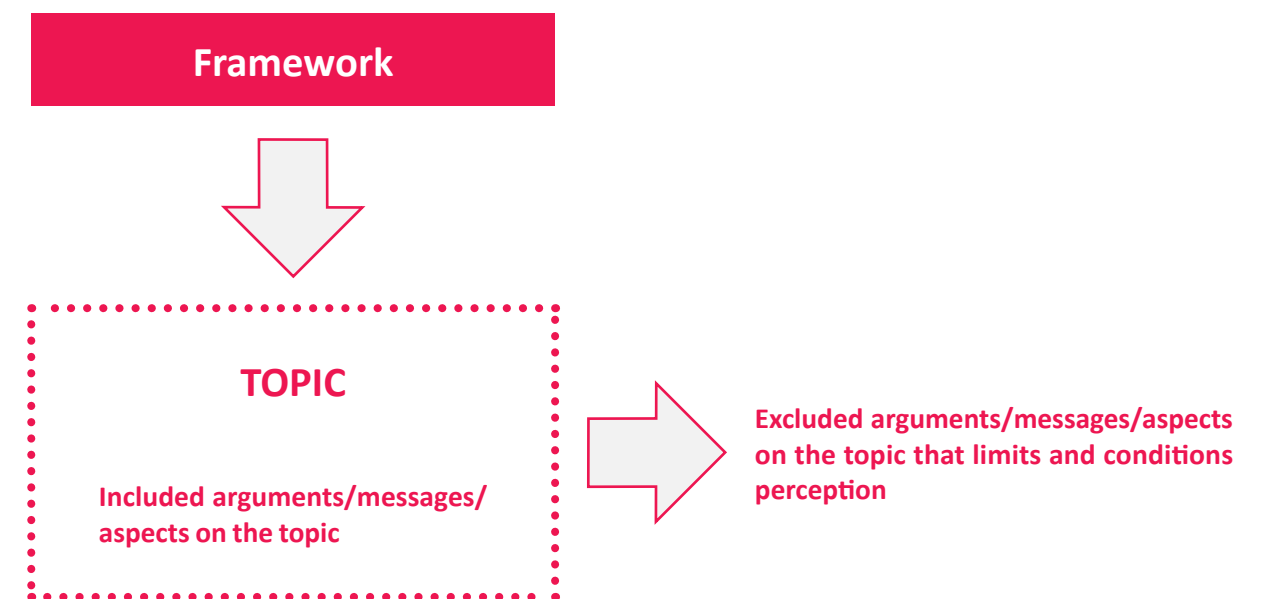
2. COMMUNICATION: CONCEPTS AND CHALLENGES

Communication, when done well, is inherently strategic. Its goal is to go beyond the simple dissemination of information. [Effective communication requires an understanding of the production, distribution and interpretation of messages](#). In the case of proactive cities, this means identifying the target audience and serving them with a message that they can decode and interpret in the intended way. Effective communication relies on an evidence base to inform both the content and the likely response from the target audience to that content. While the process relies on data for context and targeting, strategic communication recognises that both evidence-based and emotional language/messaging play a crucial role in the way information is relayed and received.

In communication about migration, the challenge is often around who and how the issue is framed. Simply reacting against the pre-existing 'Frame' only adds to its power and discourse (e.g. "Don't think about an elephant"). A framework is a lens through which the world can be perceived and interpreted. Once a framework is established, reality is perceived through such framework.

Frameworks establish limit, as well as condition and orient perceptions. The frame is placed like hard edges around a certain topic. By definition, frameworks are exclusive – to include certain messages and eliminate others – and, sometimes, they are inclusive – to remove certain arguments means to talk about others. Frameworks contain something while excluding something else. Metaphorically, they can be understood as points of a square: they tell us what to pay attention to, what should be within the framework, and how and how not to read it. They mark the boundaries and the possibilities of a rhetoric¹¹.

¹¹ PorCausa: [porCausa Nuevas Narrativas Versión Ingles](#) (English version)



a. EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS

“Our municipality is using social media to get its messages out there. We are also creating a municipality radio station, not only for Syrian refugees, but to help the municipality play a key role in communicating with the local community.”

Leila Youssef, Assistant to the Director of the International Projects and Programs Unit, Greater Irbid Municipality

“We are trying to work with GIZ to create a community radio station. It could help the migrant community and act as a way of integrating them. Via communication, we can listen to migrants and raise any issues and expectations that the community may have.”

Amina Mokrane, Vice Secretary of the Municipal Council in charge of migration, Municipality of Casablanca

When it comes to local governance and communications, local matters. Places differ and the integration challenges depend on everything from city size to locality. There is no single, uniform approach to how a city should approach its communications. However, there are some clear, [useful rules for the construction of effective campaigns](#).

Local and regional authorities need to think beyond ad hoc, [reactive responses](#) and implement consistent strategic messages that [promote an inclusive identity and a shared future](#). Strategic approaches should be evidence-based and use a range of communication channels. They should deploy facts, but also engage emotions and use humour, where possible.

The AMICALL3 project on “Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership”¹² in six European countries offers a useful typology of communications activities of local authorities, which places these into three main groupings:

¹² [Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership \(AMICALL\)](#)

- 1. [Communication campaigns](#) include awareness-raising activities, media engagement and other public relations activities. They range in aims from increasing tolerance, preventing discrimination, to promoting positive attitudes towards diversity and migrants.

The “Stop Rumores Agencia” is a communicative and social impact strategy by Andalucia Acoge, that aims at fighting negative rumors and stereotypes that affect coexistence amongst communities of **Andalucia, Ceuta and Melilla, Spain**. It is made up of more than 260 public and private entities. It provides materials and tools of varying nature, conceived and created to dispel rumors in relation to immigration, and offer advice in this regard. The overall objective is to accompany people and encourage them to question the information that they receive.¹³

¹³ <https://stoprumores.com/>

- 2. [Intercultural communications activities seek](#) to celebrate different cultures in one community and thus improving acceptance.

In **Sheffield, UK**, the annual Migration Matters Festival stages five days of events delivering a “rich and soulful programme” that brings the diverse and global mix of Sheffield’s communities together with artists from all over the world in a celebration of food, culture and performance.

In **Marburg, Germany**, the city district of Richtsberg hosts a ‘soup festival’ bringing together residents from different cultural backgrounds to enjoy the various spices and flavours from around the world. The festival, which is part of a larger diversity program in the city, accomplishes the dual goal of promoting a local identity, while overcoming prejudices.

In **Nador, Morocco** a series of intercultural events and an awareness campaign led up to an “Expo Interculturelle AFRICA”, a week of events including musical performances, culinary and cultural stands that emphasised positive exchanges between migrants and Moroccans.

- 3. [Face-to-face communications activities](#) aim to bring together different sections of the community as individuals. This can be done through public fora, informal and formal dialogue, classes or mediation.

In **Lyon, France**, the Agence Lyon Tranquillité Médiation (ALTM) initiative is designed to maintain a secure and peaceful environment Gabriel Péri square, deploys uniformed mediators to promote long-term social cohesion in a specific and ‘problematic’ area of the city.



b. PRESS AND MEDIA

“Many local authorities now have their own media, whether this be radio stations or privately-held social media, which have proved to be the most influential in the current situation. I hope that local authorities will form a committee on this issue to help support the plans to raise awareness, firstly for those working there, then for the whole team of the local authority. We will raise awareness about the importance of immigration, of migrants and pass on practical experience for specific activities that have been undertaken in local authorities in order to share knowledge and experience.”

Rakez Al-Khalaileh, Director of Studies and Institutional Development, Ministry of Local Administration in Jordan

Relations between local and regional government and the press and media are not without hurdles. A functioning media will be aware of its watchdog role and rightly resist any official direction or seal of approval to their work. But cities and regions have a story to tell and should constructively engage with media practitioners in an effort to tell it. Cities find themselves at the crossroads of horizontal communication, across municipal departments and other cities, and vertical communication, encompassing multilevel coordination with local, regional, national and international actors.

Voces del Sur (Voices of the South) has been running since 2017 and has trained 20 migrant women in journalism and communications to enable them to generate content for an Andalucían local radio network of nearly 100 stations, as well as local television partners. The network has existed for four decades and is a trusted voice in the communities it serves. The purpose of the project is integration through communication not serving good news about migration. It does not encourage the beneficiaries to report on migration but all other topics from daily life. Its main achievement is to have been able to train the women in radio.

In **Nador, Morocco** 20 journalists were selected, as part of MC2CM, and taught awareness of hate speech and trained in approaches to migration journalism by communication and migration experts. The aim was to combat negative stereotypes about migration in accordance with journalistic ethics.

These multiple channels provide cities with an ideal platform for coordination that can be used to showcase successful policies, reach out for support, learn, exchange and grow. Local media should be made aware of examples where positive engagement with migration issues improved audience ratings:

In **Barcelona, Spain** COMRàdio is a regional network that dedicates two radio stations to immigrant integration, in both Spanish and Catalan. To recognize the increasing diversity of local audiences, COMRàdio creates ‘village squares’ across the airwaves for more than 140 local stations.

In **Toronto, Canada** CBC Radio’s Business Case for Diversity combines their audience growth strategy with effective diverse hiring and recruitment practices to become the top rated morning show in the city.

Many cities are well placed to [train staff, practitioners and the media on issues of migration](#). However this should be seen as a [long-lasting investment](#) from which, even in the case of unsuccessful implementation, lessons learnt and experiences can be drawn.



- **Tunis, Tunisia:** “I-MIGR: Inclusion, Migration, Integration and Governance in Raoued and La Marsa” is a MC2CM granted action targeting different municipalities in the Greater Tunis, and aims at developing the cooperation on migration between the different local stakeholders through reinforcing their competencies on data management and migrants’ rights. I-MIGR also focuses on promoting a real and fair discourse on migration by organising events that strengthen the intercultural dialogue in the targeted cities.
- **Sfax, Tunisia:** In partnership with Tunisie Terre d’Asile, the Municipality of Sfax is implementing the MC2CM granted action “Improving the Coordination of Migration by Local Actors in Sfax (ACMALS)”. Its main objective is to establish coordination mechanisms between all the local actors on migration in Sfax, through establishing a reception centre that would provide legal and socio-economic assistance to migrants and ensure their integration. Through this action, the city addresses various Sustainable Development Goals such as 5.1, 10.7, 16.6, and 17.9.
- **Tangier, Morocco:** TangerAccueil, a MC2CM granted action in Tangier implemented by MedCities and the Municipality of Tangier, aims to support migrants’ integration and access to rights and services through establishing a ‘one-stop-shop’ for migrants. The action also strives to strengthen the capabilities of local authorities in welcoming migrants and ensure their access to socio-economic rights and services.

Leila Beratto, Journalist, member of 15-38 Méditerranée, warned that budget cuts across the whole Maghreb region impact coverage of migration: “It’s the cheapest stories that run for longest. Go and interview a politician and get quotes that will start a debate.” But Beratto advised against over emphasis on positive stories as “not the right approach to be positive you just need to show normality: Family struggles, looking for a job, normal lives.”



The table below presents a non-exhaustive list of the types of communications activities that can be implemented:

Types of Communication	Best Practices
Press releases or media conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barcelona, Spain: Call for extraordinary regularization of unauthorized immigrants; more here• Valladolid, Spain: Semana Intercultural: A Week of Sharing Ideas and Cultures; more here
Stand-alone information campaigns <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information about migrants• Information for migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Erlangen, Germany: Immigration City Erlangen; more here• Dublin, Ireland: Migrant Voters Project; more here (p. 18)
Web presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cologne, Germany: Cologne helps; more here• Erlangen, Germany: The Welcome App; more here• Collaboration of cities in Europe: MICADO; more here
Multimedia communications strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geneva, Switzerland: Genève, sa gueule; more here• São Paulo, Brasil: There is a place for everyone in São Paulo. Except for intolerance; more here (p. 59)
Media engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitising journalists• Promoting positive coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spain: Inmigracionalism Project on the media's treatment of immigration and asylum in Spain; more here
Diversity training for officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lisbon, Portugal: SOMOS Lisbon Programme for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education; more here• Leicester, United Kingdom: Everyday Policing for Equality; more here (p. 54)• Collaboration of cities in Europe: Proximity Policing Racism, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance; more here
Intercultural festivals/celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Erlangen, Germany: Anti-Rumour Picnic Banquet; more here• Frankfurt, Germany: Newcomers Festival; more here• Ravenna, Italy: Festival of Cultures; more here• Marseille, France: Marseille Esperance; more here
Physical spaces for intercultural dialogue (long-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cologne, Germany: Language area – learn together and get involved; more here• Donostia-San Sebastian, Spain: House of Peace and Human Rights; more here• Botkyrka, Sweden: Anti-Rumour Cafes; more here
Dialogue processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Copenhagen, Denmark: The Copenhagen Host Programme; more here• Lisbon, Portugal: Familia Do Lado 2019; more here• Valongo, Portugal: Living Library Program/Don't Judge a Book by its Cover; more here• Zarqa City, Jordan: Zarqa Youth City Council; more here (p. 19)
Conflict resolution/mediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Florence, Italy: Amir project; more here• Berlin, Germany: Dialogue creates neighbourhood; more here• Al Sarhan, Jordan: Strengthening Social Cohesion in Al Sarhan Municipality; more here (p. 27)
Network development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Between local/regional authorities and migrant organisations• Between communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barcelona, Spain: BCN Anti Rumour Campaign; more here• Ghent, Belgium: Refugee Solidarity; more here
Neighbourhood regeneration strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Berlin, Germany: District mothers; more here• Forlì, Italy: Widespread hospitality; more here• Amadora, Portugal: Zambujal Gets Better!; more here
City branding strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integration focus and general public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amsterdam, The Netherlands: 180 Amsterdammers; more here• Oslo, Norway: OXLO – The Oslo Extra Large; more here• Neuchâtel, Switzerland: NEUCHÂTOI; more here

3. LOCAL CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES

“Thanks to civil society, we have been able to create momentum across the country. I would like to stress the importance of strengthening our partnership with civil society, because it really does play a key role in changing the migration narrative.”

Rachida Saadi, Head of the Department of Cooperation and External Relations, Municipality of Oujda

“This work requires community outreach and should be carried out by municipalities. But at the national level, if this work is not carried out, if we don't integrate all the actions taken across different cities, we would need to universalise and pool it together, so we could refocus our efforts by encouraging cities to cooperate and by creating national campaigns to raise awareness.”

Asma Kallalla, President of the Communication Committee, Municipality of Sousse

In recent decades, cities have become more active in migration policy, developing their own philosophy and spreading awareness that effective inclusion is critical to their viability as communities. Cities are the places where migrants develop social networks, start families, find jobs, access services. They are also the places where negative consequences of mismanaged integration can be concretely felt.

This greater activism has seen cities advocate before national governments but also reach beyond the national arena to become part of networks with other cities and international organisations, such as MC2CM, Intercultural Cities, Cities of Migration and Cities of Sanctuary. Alternatively, cities have developed specific working areas on migration within the existing networks (e.g. UCLG and Eurocities) in order to exchange know-how, and to lobby supra-national institutions, such as the European Union or the United Nations.

At global level, the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) has recently set up a Working Group about Narratives where cities play a key role. The Working Group provides a unique platform for a multi-stakeholder community to take concrete action together with the aim to balance public narratives on migration and achieve tangible results, in addition to sharing best practices and lessons learned. Its membership is comprised of eight GFMD member states (Algeria, Bangladesh, Canada, Ecuador, Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, The Gambia), six members representing the local perspective (City of Mechelen, City of Montreal, City of Johannesburg, City of Sao Paulo, the GFMD Mayors Mechanism and Welcoming International), three civil society representatives (GFMD Civil Society Mechanism, Oxfam Intermon, United Nations Major Group on Children and Youth) and two business representatives (GFMD Business Mechanism, ERC Worldwide, Talent Beyond Boundaries).

The GFMD Working Group on Public Narratives on Migration, led by Canada, Ecuador and the GFMD Mayors Mechanism, is working in collaboration, among others, with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to create an international, multi-stakeholder, digital communications campaign to showcase migrants' contributions and help balance the narrative about migration.

ICMPD is also member of the working group and is contributing by sharing the results and knowledge gained through the research conducted in the framework of the Euromed Migration programme on value-based communications and impact assessment of communications campaigns.

This initiative plans to advance the implementation of the GCM with a focus on Objective 17, promoting open and evidence-based public discourse, in addition to supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for all).

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The City of **Turku, Finland** annually nominates a person with a migrant background as the ‘Year’s New Citizen’. It selects the person based on how much they promote integration in their everyday life and region. This practice promotes personal contact between citizens of different backgrounds, and contributes to social cohesion.

The City of **Erlangen, Germany** initiated a museum tour Zuwanderungsstadt Erlangen (Immigration city Erlangen). The participants rediscover the city’s history through a migratory perspective, and experience the impact of immigration on the city’s development.

The City of **Amsterdam, Netherlands** launched a campaign in which it displays the portraits of individuals from 180 different nationalities, in local media as well as social media, to emphasize the diversity and the richness of their community.



3.1 TOWARDS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

The increased activism and the accompanying network effect of cities talking to each other means there is an emerging playbook of effective approaches. All of them rely on shifting from reactive to strategic communication at the local level.

The starting point is the [development of an inclusive communication strategy](#). This should involve relevant stakeholders and form part of the approach of a wider city development, branding or communication strategy, where possible.

This strategy determines how the city communicates internally (within the administration and vertically with all levels of government) and externally (to the general public and target groups). Examples of target audiences for communication on migration include:

- » Migrant groups
- » Non-migrant populations
- » Local public service providers
- » Media and opinion leaders

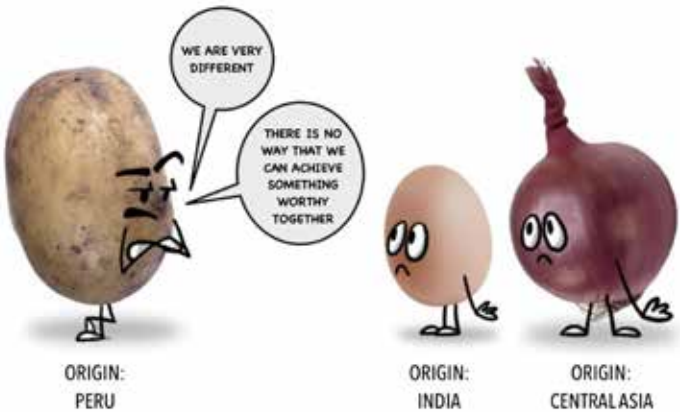
Typically, a communication strategy proposes a variety of activities geared towards engaging and addressing each of these different target audiences.

Knowledge of the local context (including history, attitudes, and perceptions) helps set out an informed communication strategy and predict potential hurdles, and how to overcome/address them.

Ten Moroccan municipalities (Beni Mellal, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakesh, Nador, Oujda, Rabat, Salé, Tangier and Tiznit) were supported in mainstreaming migration and mobility in municipal action plans by the German development agency, GIZ. The cities received support and training to run pilot projects offering social, economic and cultural integration for migrants, refugees and Moroccan returnees. Together with a local NGO, the project has informed 4,000 young people across Morocco about the issues of diversity and mobility.

These three guidelines from PorCausa in Spain are useful to bear in mind when framing a new message or campaign:

- » The messages must be new and must not be reactive to another message that has previously been established.
- » The messages must not depend on a narrative that is defined by the existence of two parts: “us” and “them”.
- » The messages must be structured on emotions without relying on data as a narrative argument.



a. CITIES AS AGENTS OF MIGRATION

Access to information for new arrivals in cities can be limited by language barriers and awareness. Effective outreach to newcomers through existing migrant associations or other modes of welcome can be crucial in fostering initial progress on integration.

In **Malaga, Spain** newcomers get a letter from the Mayor’s office explaining to them which services are available to them in their own language. It informs them about the “Participation in Migration Office”, which puts them in touch with those associations that already exist in the city. Beyond this initial networking, vocational training is offered that matches migrants with sector such as tourism where employment prospects are strongest.

In **Vienna, Austria** the “Start Wien” programme sees detailed information sessions twice a month for newcomers to understand the options and opportunities the city has to offer. The programme is divided into several information modules, where specific groups such as youth and adult groups as well as families are targeted. These modules involve basic topics such as education, healthcare, housing, living together and more specific issues on discrimination, gender roles and leisure activities, among others. Language classes are also offered, as well as vocational training at a later stage for qualified applicants to strengthen their field of expertise.



b. ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION

Contact theory holds that prejudices and negative opinions of migrants rarely survive actual time spent with or in proximity to migrant groups. Fostering constructive contact between host populations and both new arrivals, as well as long term resident communities should be a priority for local authorities. This can be achieved by intercultural events and dialogues, as well as communications campaigns to challenge stereotypes and raise awareness.

The “MygranTour” project is a European network which organises ‘migrant tours’ and routes to highlight how migrants contribute in shaping the city and understanding interculturality and cultural diversity. It is a form of local and responsible tourism, and a way to capitalise on building strong ties between territories and cultures. The initiative runs in many European cities, including **Paris, Lisbon, Turin, and Brussels**, and the tours are guided by migrants from the respective city.¹⁴ <http://www.mygrantour.org/en/migrantour-paris/>

Morocco: “Playground” is a joint UNHCR and UNICEF project of street basketball aiming at breaking social and cultural barriers between young Moroccans, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and supporting their integration into Moroccan society.



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence shows that diversity is strength¹⁵. The proving ground for this is found in cities. The most diverse and inclusive cities are also the most successful and attractive. The force underpinning this diversity is migration. Two-thirds of economic development in cities is determined by their population flow.

Migration can also present a challenge to social cohesion. Without effective communication of the benefits of migration with all levels of society, pragmatic and positive attitudes to the influx of skills and human capital can sour into negative perceptions of diversity and migrants. Once these negative frameworks are established, they can be tough to reframe. Cities need to take on the challenge of communication in order to fulfil the potential of diversity as a driver of economic development, while ensuring inclusion is seen to work in a way that preserves social cohesion.

Local contexts differ sharply in cities around the Mediterranean. Some cities face a generational shift from points of departure to a role as places of transit or hosting. Some cities face unemployment crises, while others face acute skills shortages. Some municipalities find their positions on migration closely aligned with national governments, while others conflict. All of them share a common understanding that rebalancing the narrative on migration is necessary to [work effectively with the reality and normality of human mobility](#).

Even before the arrival of the COVID-19, there were clear signs that perceptions of migration had become dangerously detached from the evidence base of its real impacts. The centrality of cities to the pandemic – with their frontline health responders and population density – makes them uniquely well placed to achieve a communications corrective in the recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

¹⁵ McKinsey: [Inclusive cities are productive cities](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT CAN HELP LOCAL AUTHORITIES

1. Build an evidence base

Collect data to inform and depict an accurate picture of your local migration context. When recent data is unavailable, include stakeholders with deep knowledge of local migration history and precedents. Monitoring and impact assessment are vital to evaluating communication and service provision. Avoid an exclusive focus on immigration and tap international resources to consider return migration, brain drain, as well as emerging patterns in transit migration.

2. Build capacity

Effective communication on migration requires specialist skills. Communication capacity can lag as a priority, especially during times of acute crisis such as the pandemic. Make the argument for its importance. Cities remain the ideal platform for communicating success stories that will attract future resources and opportunities to exchange and grow.

3. Build alliances

Look beyond the national arena to international and supranational networks of cities, which are building effective alliances. These, along with international agencies, can be important sources of direct support. They are also a repository of an increasing wealth of knowledge on best practices. Allies can also be found among civil society organisations both as local implementing partners and force multipliers whose own networks and channels can provide crucial entry points to vulnerable or hard to reach groups. This is critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the public health value of inclusive cities has been starkly underlined.

4. Beware disinformation

While the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to rebalance the narrative on migration by emphasising the practical, societal benefits of diversity and inclusiveness, it also presents a threat. The twin crises in public health and the economy create fertile ground for malicious narratives, which seek to scapegoat migrants. The consequences of the “infodemic” can be as serious as those of the pandemic itself.

5. Build bridges

Polarizing narratives on migration do not accurately reflect long-term public attitudes towards migration, which are more stable and trending slightly positive. Various formulations have been established to express the division of opinion on migration (haters/ambivalents/lovers) and suggest a concentration on the largest group, the middle category of “ambivalents”. Effective narratives will understand the anxieties of ambivalents and build positive associations between diversity and areas such as tradition and security. Identify shared local identities that speak to these concerns and emphasise common ground.

6. Build for the long term

Migration is not a crisis, it is a human condition. Ad hoc responses to issues such as disinformation may be necessary, but do not replace the need for a coherent plan. Think strategically about building internal capacity and, where possible, diversity in municipal teams. Train staff, practitioners and the media on the benefits of migration. Cultivate relationships with local media who are often the gateway to national coverage. Incorporate migration as a component in strategic plans on areas from jobs to education and culture.

