



Mediterranean City-to-City Migration

Dialogue, Knowledge and Action

Sub-Regional Peer-Learning Event

Building Trust Through Strengthened Cooperation: The Role of Civil Society in the Urban Governance of Migration

25-26 June 2019, Municipal Hall, Sfax

Summary of Discussions

Context

This document summarises the results of the sub-regional peer-learning event of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2CM) project held under the auspices of **Sfax Municipality** on 25-26 June 2019. The event convened more than 60 participants from around 30 municipalities and local government associations, 16 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the African regional section of UCLG (UCLG-A), as well as experts and representatives of international organisations. Participants were selected on the basis of a competitive application process. (The programme is available [here](#))

This second sub-regional Peer-Learning Event tackled the issue of cooperation between municipalities and CSOs for improved migration governance. The thematic scope derives from the recommendations and priorities set forth by participating cities in the launch meeting of the project's Phase II (Vienna, October 2018). The cities and CSOs present at the event face various challenges related to migration and forced displacement, from localities that recently welcomed unprecedented flows of refugees to municipalities that are located in regions of departure or regions of transit for migrants heading to Europe or/and other places where migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa increasingly settle. This diversity of situations impacts how cities and CSOs cooperate with local entities and how they coordinate among them.

The discussions were held under Chatham House rules, so outside of official statements and case studies presented – comments from the discussion and exchanges are not attributed.

Photos of the event are available [here](#).

Official Opening and Welcoming Remarks

Mr. Mohamed Aydi, Head of Decentralized Cooperation and External Affairs representing Sfax Municipality, welcomed participants on behalf of Mayor Mounir Elloumi, emphasising the role of Sfax in welcoming migrants and refugees, especially during the Libyan civil war in 2011. Mr. Aydi also praised the work of local CSOs that have become increasingly active in supporting vulnerable migrants in Sfax.

Ms. Leila Garbouj, Program Officer at the Swiss Cooperation Office in Tunisia, confirmed the interest of the Swiss cooperation in the activities conducted by Tunisian CSOs in the area of migration. Ms. Garbouj encouraged a constructive dialogue about the benefits and downsides of migration during the event.

Ms. Donya Smida, Head of ICMPD Tunis Office and Project Manager of ProGreS Migration, explained the role of ICMPD in Tunisia and stressed on the innovative approach MC2CM follows in exploring the multi-level governance of migration along with the migration-urbanisation nexus.

Mr. Mohamed Boussraoui, Senior Migration Manager at UCLG, welcomed the convening of the meeting and noted that it was very well-timed to gather municipalities and CSOs with regards to recent developments on migration governance at global level. He indicated that the current phase of MC2CM demonstrated the added value of knowledge exchange between cities and he encouraged the consolidation of UCLG's Community of Practice on migration. Mr. Boussraoui concluded that MC2CM was instrumental to informing UCLG's advocacy work.

Mr. Lamine Abbad, Project Manager at ICMPD, presented the objectives of the event and the methodology of the sessions. Mr Abbad highlighted the importance of sharing local practices and experiences between cities and CSOs facing similar challenges.

Key Concepts and Definitions

Mr. Camille Le Coz, Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Institute Europe, presented key concepts on the contribution of CSOs to the urban governance of migration, drawing from the [background document](#):

- Municipalities are often at the forefront of welcoming and delivering assistance to newcomers – especially the most vulnerable – and they usually need the support of CSOs to provide adequate services in time. Cities have also been increasingly involved in the design and implementation of integration strategies, and they are now more engaged in the promotion of diversity.
- In recent years, CSOs have played an active role in the migration field, primarily by (i) raising awareness about migrants' rights, for instance supporting the welcoming process of newcomers; (ii) enhancing migrants' access to services, either through dedicated assistance or by connecting them with existing emergency support; and finally (iii) promoting social inclusion and the political participation of migrants through their participation in local assemblies or through the creation of intercultural fora.
- The cooperation between municipalities and CSOs is usually focused on two main areas: information sharing as well as contribution to operational and policy design. This joint work is, however, not always prosperous and there are risks associated in terms of lack of

coordination and diverging objectives and mandates between these entities. The main difficulties usually stem from (i) policy inconsistencies; (ii) limitations in terms of funding, transparency mechanisms and sustainability; (iii) the level of response to emerging needs; (iv) the degree of independence of CSOs when they depend on public funding; and (v) areas for further capacity-building and professionalisation for CSOs and local actors.

Partnerships Between Cities and CSOs – Good Practices from the Field

Cities and CSOs elaborated their respective role in addressing challenges faced at local level. Participants mapped out the needs faced by migrants on the move – ranging from access to emergency shelters, to food and legal counselling – and stressed on the fact that children and women were particularly vulnerable groups. Stakeholders from municipalities and civil society agreed that they must join forces to meet the needs of migrants and host communities.


Representatives of CSOs and municipalities then shared their field experiences and best practices. A total of 10 initiatives were presented ([here](#)), with the common objectives of promoting intercultural dialogue and addressing the needs of migrants whether they were, refugees, internally displaced persons, or migrants in transit and/or new residents. The themes of the presentations explored the three main areas where CSOs and cities work together:

- How to provide emergency assistance for migrants and refugees in emergency situations (e.g. at the Lebanese border with Syria, in Libya);
- How to facilitate migrants' access to basic services (e.g. Caritas in Sfax);
- How to promote diversity and intercultural dialogues in cities that host migrants and refugees (e.g. Meknes, Malaga).

Main Challenges of Coordination Between Municipalities and CSOs

After mapping the areas where CSOs and municipalities work together, the session moderated by **Ms. Lina Gast, Learning Officer at UCLG**, focused on coordination issues between these actors. Five main challenges emerged from the debate:

- Municipalities and CSOs convened that **the lack of data** on the number and profiles of migrants was a main difficulty for tailoring local policies and interventions. Better information sharing and drafting migration profiles at city level were discussed as ways to address this issue.
- **Inadequate legal frameworks** were also pointed out as a key challenge for CSOs and municipalities. Cities presented the difficulties they face to fulfil their mandate as central authorities whom often fail to their responsibilities; therefore it was suggested that municipalities work on getting them more involved than is legally required. The lack of funding sources is also to be taken into account as another challenge.
- **Lack or limited competence of local authorities** concerned with migration issues. This adds up to the **ambiguities** of national legal frameworks, and most specifically the grey area between what is legal and what is tolerated. For instance, some NGOs reported that they cannot, in theory, assist undocumented migrants because they are irregular, whereas this group is highly vulnerable, and often requires emergency assistance. The same way, several



cities reported that some categories of migrants or refugees do not have the right to work but local entrepreneurs still hire them locally (though often at a lower wage). Related to this is also the challenge posed by the mismatches between migration programs and the real needs of migrants.

- CSOs and cities that have faced large flows of refugees or migrants in recent years also discussed the need to **better manage crises in the future**, and to work together to develop contingency plans, to better identify early warnings and to be ready to coordinate their interventions on the ground. Insufficient communication among city stakeholders and the urban community, especially where strong networks for urban migration are not in place, further worsens this situation.
- A final addressed challenge was the lack of experience of some CSOs and **how recent their cooperation with local authorities is** in some regions. In countries like Morocco, CSOs have been active for decades and they have experience in working with municipalities, bidding for funding, managing projects and reporting on their activities. By comparison, independent NGOs in Tunisia or Libya are only emerging and many are yet to assert their expertise and go through a phase of consolidation and professionalisation. In a country like Tunisia, local democracy is also new and so the cooperation between cities and civil society actors have only started recently.

Recommendations to Ensure Sustainable, Flexible & Effective Coordination Between Cities & CSOs

During the final session chaired by **Mr Jesus Salcedo, Associate Expert at UN-Habitat**, participants explored how to move towards a more sustainable, flexible and effective coordination. The following priorities were identified:

- **Legal framework:** While participants acknowledged that this action belongs to the national level, they convened that they could continue to advocate for strengthening their role in the governance of migration at national and international levels.
- **Coordination and partnerships between CSOs with cities:** Building on the good practices of several cities, participants agreed that regular coordination meetings between CSOs – and also with the local authorities – were critical to establish effective cooperation and information sharing mechanisms. Several participants encouraged the development of formal partnerships between cities and CSOs as a way to grant a special status to trustworthy CSOs and facilitate their access to funding. Ultimately, this coordination and partnerships should feed a common strategy at local level.
- **Capacity building of local agents who work on migration:** As noted by participants, civil servants at the local level often lack the knowledge of migrants’ and refugees’ rights; therefore building their capacity in this field can form a solid base for a constructive coordination between cities and CSOs.
- **Inclusion of host communities and assistance to all vulnerable groups:** As pointed out by several municipalities, the presence of migrants can sometimes become a source of tension within host communities. This can then generate disagreements between local authorities and CSOs, when the city has to prioritise other needs than the migrants’. A way forward would be to increase awareness and dialogue between host communities and migrants, in

order to promote a better cohesion at local level and, ultimately, a strengthened coordination of the assistance provided to all vulnerable groups.

- **Pragmatism:** Throughout the event, participants reported the lack of resources to meet the needs of migrants. CSOs shared that they often lack funding to adequately provide for migrants. At the same time, municipalities acknowledged that they sometimes have to prioritise other issues, while they also face budgetary constraints. In short, better coordination and dialogue between municipalities and CSOs should also result in more pragmatism about what can be achieved locally, with limited resources and the other pressing issues the city needs to address.

Key Learnings and Way Forward

1. **Adequate legal frameworks are key to support an effective management of the opportunities and challenges associated with migration.** The role of CSOs in the migration field and the status of migrants and refugees need to be clearly defined by a legal framework.
2. **CSOs are a key player in sharing information and good practices.** Due to their presence at field level, CSOs are in a unique position to share data with cities and to support the development of related policies and procedures, as well as contingency planning.
3. **CSOs are critical partners in delivering services to vulnerable groups at local level, migrants and non-migrants.** Various CSOs have expertise in providing emergency support to people in need, regardless of their status. This includes facilitating access to basic services like health and education, along with enhancing access to employment.
4. **Good coordination can be improved, thanks to a formalised mechanism.** As demonstrated by several initiatives at local level, various coordination mechanisms exist to share information, ideas and projects. These are often ad hoc and need to be formalised – especially in countries where the emergence of independent CSOs and local democracy are recent and this culture of cooperation does not exist yet.
5. **Cities and CSOs may have different priorities, but they need to converge towards common objectives.** All local stakeholders need to find common ground and understand the constraints and limitations faced by their counterparts.

Closing remarks

Mr. Lamine Abbad, Project Manager at ICMPD, reiterated that the challenges associated with migration call for better cooperation between local officials and CSOs; he added that this requires formal coordination mechanisms along with the acknowledgement of internal constraints on both sides.

Mr. Mohamed Aydi, Head of Decentralized Cooperation and External Affairs representing Sfax Municipality, reminded that Sfax has experienced challenges associated with unmanaged and unexpected migration flows, but has welcomed the cooperation with civil society as an opportunity for improved multi-level governance at local level.

Annex: Examples of Practices on Cooperation between CSOs and MC2CM cities

Intercultural Exhibition: Africa 2017 in Nador

The municipality of Nador and the *Association Thissaghnesse pour la Culture et le Développement* (ASTICUDE) worked together to promote Nador as an inclusive and multicultural city. The objective of this collaboration was to show how migrants contribute to the local culture and therefore partners decided to organise intercultural exhibitions on a regular basis. A wide range of other actors were involved, including ministries, donors and migrant communities. As reported during the event, ASTICUDE and the municipality established a formal coordination mechanism, along with a monitoring system to track the outcomes of their activities. The latest edition of the exhibition included 10 African countries while it has become a landmark event for the city.

Initiative of Brital to Assist Syrian Refugees

Compared to other cities, Brital had to respond to an emergency situation with a rapid influx of Syrian refugees (over 8,500 for a local population of 25,000). The city had to welcome these newcomers and mitigate the impact on its residents. In the absence of sufficient support from the central government, the municipality started actively engaging with local actors to find tailored solutions to the crisis. The city played a critical role in mapping out the needs and potential partners to address them. Thus, the municipality organised coordination at two levels, with refugees and locals, but also with CSOs, international organisations and donors. While the situation could have quickly deteriorated, Brital's leadership actually guaranteed basic assistance to newcomers and helped to limit the pressure on local public services.

"Be a migrant and talk about citizenship in Malaga" by the Association Marocaine pour l'Intégration des Migrant.e.s

This initiative involved the municipality of Malaga, the *Association Marocaine pour l'Intégration des Migrant.e.s* and a variety of local CSOs closely linked to migrant communities. The objective was for migrants living in Malaga to promote cultural exchanges about what it means to be a migrant and what they think about citizenship. A variety of activities were organised, mixing up officials, host communities and migrants, to encourage new relations between communities that usually do not interact with each other.

Cooperation between Meknes and the Confederation of African Students and Interns in Morocco

This initiative was due to bridge the gap between the municipality and the CSOs standing for the participation of African students and interns in the public space. The city of Meknes started working more closely with the local Confederation of African Students and Interns in Morocco and is now about to sign a formal agreement with this organisation. This should pave the way for the design of an annual action plan to be jointly implemented by the CSO and the city. As reported by Meknes, the most promising outcome of this cooperation has been a better inclusion of African students in local events and the deployment of additional efforts from the municipality to integrate them in local decisions.

Projet d'appui à l'amélioration des politiques publiques au Cameroun en matière de respect du droit à un logement décent, Caritas Douala

Under this project, Caritas worked closely with local communities in Douala to raise awareness about their rights in terms of access to decent housing and develop proposals for better housing policies. Caritas worked closely with local authorities to increase their knowledge of local housing issues, disseminate the findings of their research and also lobby for better policies. As a result of the project, residents who had faced eviction or risked facing displacement in the future came together, gained access to information and started advocating for policy change.

Dispositif d'accompagnement des migrants, Terre d'Asile Tunisie

The project aims at improving the conditions for migrant populations in Tunisia, from better social and economic integration of migration to the respect of their rights. To do so, Terre d'Asile strengthened the coordination with local authorities, to increase their awareness of the challenges faced by migrants and to ensure that they refer these populations to the adequate local services. This led to various cooperation mechanisms, from formal partnerships between government and NGO organisations to informal coordination (e.g. referrals for specific cases). Thanks to the work of Terre d'Asile, the initiative resulted in better service delivery for migrants, increased awareness among local and NGO actors about migrant rights and a strengthened coordination overall.

Capacity and Knowledge Building of the Asylum Law, Tunisian Human Rights League

The initiative implemented by the Tunisian Human Rights League aimed at improving the knowledge of government representatives, the media and CSOs about the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. The League organised a series of training and knowledge exchange sessions about themes related to refugee rights in Tunisia. The project ultimately led to the creation of a network of CSOs to advocate for refugee rights, it helped to improve the local integration of refugees and also informed the drafting of a new law on asylum.

Securing Cooperation through Education, Ayady Al Khair Society for Relief and Charity Work

This project aims to promote better knowledge about migrants' rights among the authorities that manage the Migrant Detention Centre (MDC) in Tajoura. Ayady Al Khair Society for Relief and Charity Work works with three other CSOs to disseminate knowledge about migrant rights and the legal framework under which the MDC operates, but also builds bridges between local authorities (particularly the ones that manage the centre) and CSOs. The NGOs plans to organise a series of workshops to raise awareness about the issues faced by migrants in Libya.