



Mediterranean City-to-City Migration

Dialogue, Knowledge and Action

Peer-Learning Event

Thematic Reference Document

Urban Citizenship: A transformative pathway to achieve Cities that recognize, include and care for all residents

16 – 18 March 2021

Location: Online via Zoom (Hosted by the Municipality of Grenoble, France)

The following document explores the emerging concept of **urban citizenship**¹ as a promising vision to bring the notion of the “right to the city for all” into practice, especially for migrant residents. Key to envisage alternative local channels to guarantee fundamental rights when those are deprived due to administrative status, the urban citizenship concept also allows local stakeholders to adopt more systematic approaches to inclusion – from creating new channels of political participation to harnessing symbolic recognition. For local governments, the urban citizenship notion can help to better articulate sectoral interventions on migration through a shared narrative and transformative policy vision, renovating local narratives on inclusion and finding ways to circumvent limitations to local action in the field.

¹ This document understands **urban citizenship** in a broad sense, recognizing similar notions that refer to it as “**local citizenship**” or “**inclusive citizenship**”. For its assigned purpose, it identifies shared features behind these political concepts, all of which has a background enshrined in a specific political and policy tradition. Fundamentally, all these different concepts explore how citizenship can be redefined and turned into more inclusive for those which are excluded from it (in this case, focusing on migrants in particular, even though some discussions dealt with a broader understanding) through a local understanding of it, regardless of the nature or size of the urban territory or locality involved.

1 Citizenship rights and international migrants: An introduction


Citizenship is a key political concept that we can approach today through two main entry points. On the one hand, it is a channel to guarantee rights as provided by public administration and a symbol of recognition as a member of a given political community. On the other hand, it can also be identified as the lack of it (citizenship) and as a reason to deprive a person from these same rights. Indeed, the issue of human rights universality and deprivation due to citizenship status remains largely unresolved and continues to affect a wide variety of social groups and minorities today, in which migrants and refugees stand out as one of the largest affected group.

As a matter of fact, the question “*who has the rights to have rights*” has been one of the most critical discussion elements for the modern human rights framework since its inception back in 1948, when the renowned philosopher Hannah Arendt launched this sceptical question shortly after the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Reflecting on her personal experience as Holocaust survivor – by that time she was already granted political asylum but not the status of citizen – Arendt identified a fundamental contradiction behind the emerging notion of human rights as inscribed in the 1948 Universal Declaration, questioning how would this framework manage to effectively protect individuals displaced or not recognized by their own political community. What rights for those who are not recognized as members of the nation, as ultimately expressed by the enjoyment of citizenship status?

Today, and despite their high visible presence in host societies, most international migrants are still denied many citizenship rights due to their administrative status (Bosniak, 2007). Global data estimates on migrants’ in an irregular situation are hard to produce, especially because of the complex definition underlying the same concept. IOM estimates this numbers by world regions (11.3 millions in the United States, 3.6 million in the European Union²) out of a total 272 million identified international migrants in 2019 (IOM, 2020) - many of which might also be affected by citizenship rights deprivation due to their administrative status.

Undoubtedly, the issue of citizenship rights enjoyment beyond one’s administrative status has become even more relevant in our days due to the growing rate of international migration within the whole world’s population (a 3.5% in 2019, face to a 2.3% in 1970 according to IOM data). In practical terms, the barriers linked with the none enjoyment of the citizenship status turns all international migrants’ interactions with the host society public administrations (thus, their access to rights such as health, education or housing) and other key stakeholders offering personal development opportunities (such as potential employers) into a challenge. More broadly, it sets a symbolical barrier with the host society hindering, along with other interrelated factors, their long-term social inclusion process.

² <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/irregular-migration>



2 Reclaiming the notion of citizenship as a pathway to guarantee everyone's right to the city, especially migrant residents

Even though local governments often are the first level of administration to seek solving some of these immediate challenges, their efforts and decisions to offer municipal services to immigrant populations are in many cases overturned by national directives (Gebhart, 2016). Still, local governments count with a consolidated experience in creating reception and inclusion strategies. As exemplified by Benjamin Barber in his iconic work *If Mayors Ruled the World*, “If you asked a mayor, ‘Do you think immigrants should be allowed in [the city] or not?’ they would say ‘They are here’” (Barber, 2013). Even though this assumption does not reflect all mayors’ points of view about the issue, it does highlight a defining element of local democracy which is highly relevant for this discussion and shows how local elected representatives are marked by the local governments’ accountability to the most immediate demands of residents and to the overall need of building social cohesion through a mix of pragmatism and innovation.

Migrants, on accord of their quotidian habitation and interactions with fellow inhabitants, become de facto citizens – as its etymological meaning reveals, “inhabitants of the city”. In the end, cities are the place where the sense of belonging and sharing a mutual identity – so characteristic in the notion of citizenship – is acquired individually but also collectively. Indeed, cities’ immaterial traditions and defining features, their monuments and physical environments, are all built upon the contributions of countless generations of migrants, all of which granted to the ever-evolving face of urban identity a new piece of unique personality.

Therefore, it is not strange to see how discourses and practices reframing the notion of citizenship from a local point of view emerged across the world over the last decades. These approaches, referred to as **urban citizenship** (as used in this document), **inclusive citizenship** or **local citizenship**, generally aim at addressing migrants’ social inclusion process from a transformative yet also pragmatic point of view. Building on transformative notions of living together, shared identity and localized belonging, they propose an overarching vision by which all kinds of local actors’ can trigger social inclusion and human rights access pathways for all city’s residents, regardless of their administrative status.

Urban citizenship espouses a philosophy that grants access to rights on the basis of residency, facilitates access to rights granted by the national or international level, and plugs the gaps in rights through local action where possible (Gebhart, 2016). The urban citizenship model is also viewed by the cities as an alternative framework towards the inclusion of new and existing heterogeneous groups of immigrants (Brown, 2008). Along with issues of status and rights, identity matters – such as enjoyment of cultural rights and political expression – are also deemed crucial for building urban citizenship (Joppke, 2010). According to Castañeda, three requirements should be met for migrant residents to fully enjoy the right to the city: legal permission to be in the city, right to enjoy public spaces and the right of all residents to shape and change their city by their collective actions (Castañeda, 2012).

Learning from the human rights cities movement

The human rights cities movement has played an instrumental role in advancing the notion of human rights promotion and protection at the local level. Therefore, it laid the foundations for a more ambitious policy development of the urban citizenship notion.

Indeed, the human rights city vision highlights local governments' right and responsibility to address human rights issues within their own territory (such as rights' deprivation to migrant residents), but also proposes a transformative framework and policy vision to address these issues by tackling their root causes, usually related to entrenched inequality and exclusion (thus, connecting with paradigms like urban citizenship).

The human rights vision is inscribed in international documents such as the Global Charter-Agenda for a Human Rights in the City (2011) or the Gwangju Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City (2014), but also local declarations and policy documents such as the Vienna City of Human Rights Declaration (2015), the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City (2010) or the Barcelona Methodological Guide on Human Rights Cities (2019).

At present, hundreds of local governments across the world declare themselves human rights cities and work together as a movement to contribute to global human rights discussions from a local point of view - highlighting for instance local priorities such as the need to address the inequality crisis, the rise of racism or the financialization of housing.

3 Urban citizenship in practice: Local solutions and policy innovations to build recognition, inclusion and care pathways

As local governments commit to become guarantors of residents' fundamental rights, they contribute to nourish and reformulate the idea of urban citizenship: both as a renewed framework for redefining the sense of living together but also to defend the principle of human rights universality. At present, more and more local authorities are advancing concrete initiatives putting into practice this vision worldwide. Even though these interventions might be sectoral and focus only on one of the issues described, addressing all of them through a shared narrative might reveal several fundamental local innovations. First, the growing margins of local governments' intervention capacity on an issue that does not fall within their direct competence due to their capacity to produce innovative institutional and policy arrangements. Second, the promising role of urban citizenship in connecting different intervention logics through a shared vision favouring recognition, inclusion and caring.

Three main policy pathways aimed at advancing the urban citizenship vision are identified below: a first one, related to "**political participation**"; a second one dealing with the promotion of a "**shared sense of community and urban identity**"; and a last one more directly related to "**human rights access and non-discrimination**".

3.1. Recognition: Political participation

As espoused in the original notion of citizenship, participation plays a key role in advancing the resident's belonging to an urban community (HIC-HLRN, 2017). At present, many local governments circumvent limitations depriving migrant residents from their right to participate in public affairs by establishing alternative participation mechanisms at the local level. Good examples of this trend can be found in **Grenoble**³ and **São Paulo**⁴, which implemented migrant councils fostering alternative channels for migrants to directly participate in local public affairs. The Taiwanese city of **Taoyuan**⁵ also put in place a participatory budget system targeting migrant residents with a view to foster their social inclusion process. Ecuador's capital of **Quito** counts with a Human Rights Protection Council channeling the participation of migrant groups in local public affairs and its social inclusion agenda⁶.

However, fostering migrants' participation in local affairs does not refer to institutional or formal means of participation only, as other cities focus on supporting migrant associations or their participation in civic life. As explored in a 2019 MC2CM Peer Learning, **Sfax** and **Meknès** have both compelling experiences on this subject⁷. **Barcelona's** Municipal Council on Immigration supports migrant residents' grassroots organisations political participation and overall contribution to local human rights promotion in the city⁸. Chinese cities like **Chengdu** implemented participatory methodologies to foster dialogue among new neighbourhood residents, contributing to improve conviviality between migrants and other residents⁹.

3.2. Inclusion: Shared sense of community and urban identity

The notion of participation refers also to migrant residents' access to quality public spaces. In short, redefining all residents' relationship with the built environment can help accommodate, reflect and recognize the contributions of all residents to the broad idea of urban identity (García-Chueca, 2019). The MC2CM project already explored initiatives led by **Amman** and **Lisbon**¹⁰ showcasing the role of urban upgrading in guaranteeing migrants' right to the city. Other related initiatives to the built environment can be found, for examples, in public equipments like local museums on migration – such as the ones of **London**¹¹, **Montevideo**¹² or **Catalonia**¹³ – to renaming street or redefining the meaning and place of public monuments – as addressed by **Britain's Local Government Association**¹⁴.

In order to be able to fully participate in the community, migrants usually need to acquire specific skills (like knowing the local language(s)) and access networking opportunities beyond one's own community. There's a wide myriad of good practices implemented by local governments on this matter. **Utrecht** implements the "Plan Einstein policy" providing integrated networking, training and language learning

³ <https://www.grenoble.fr/94-conseil-consultatif-des-residents-etrangers-grenoblois.htm>

⁴ https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/direitos_humanos/imigrantes_e_trabalho_decente/conselho_municipal_de_imigrantes/index.php

⁵ <https://oidp.net/distinction/en/record01.2018.php>

⁶ <https://proteccionderechosquito.gob.ec/consejo-de-proteccion-2/>

⁷ <https://www.learning.uclg.org/file/pln-25-urban-migration-and-civil-society-sfax>

⁸ <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/consell-municipal-immigracio/en/>

⁹ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/observatory/new-migrant-inclusion-policy-transient-community>

¹⁰ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/new-case-studies-fostering-social-inclusion-migrants-local-level>


¹¹ <https://www.migrationmuseum.org/about-our-project/> and

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070212163614/http://www.untoldlondon.org.uk/etc/UNTOLDDABOUTUSTXT.html>

¹² <https://mumi.montevideo.gub.uy/>

¹³ <http://www.mhic.net/>

¹⁴ <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety/statues>



opportunities¹⁵. **Malmö** produced an information guide to foster unaccompanied minors language and cultural inclusion during their first months in Sweden¹⁶. Other cities employ social activities like sport clubs or educational events to reinforce migrants' inclusion: see the examples of **Granollers**¹⁷ and **Grigny**¹⁸. Lebanese and Jordanian cities like **Beirut**¹⁹ or **Irbid**²⁰ count with good experiences in the matter of work inclusion and access to the labour market focusing on the recycling business, while **Vienna** fosters migrants' access to the labour market through vocational education²¹.

But these measures alone might not suffice to combat negative trends affecting migrants' pathway to feel recognized as part of the community. This refers especially to discriminatory events occurred in both public spaces or private environments. **Barcelona's** Discrimination Observatory represents a good example of how can local governments cooperate with civil society in monitoring this phenomenon at a city level²². Public campaigning and anti-racist strategies are also essential in this matter, especially because they visualize local stakeholders commitment to the issue – from the government level to private sector and associative networks. Other city strategies focused on counteracting negative public discourses by emphasizing migrants' contribution to local dynamism and civic life.

Good examples of these trends can be found in campaigns or events launched by cities like **Nador**²³, **Lampedusa**²⁴, **New York**²⁵, **Montevideo**²⁶ and **Banjarmasin**²⁷. **Nuremberg** coordinates a biannual award which honors local companies committed to the dignity and rights of their staff supporting also the City's activities against racism beyond the scope stipulated by legal norms²⁸. **Torino** launched a public initiative to treat the notion of “anti-racism” as a common good, showcasing the city's commitment on this matter²⁹.

3.3. Care: Human rights access and non-discrimination

If guaranteeing access to basic services is a key pathway to build urban citizenship, local governments have found various ways to circumvent existing restrictions and limitations posed by administrative status, relying particularly on soft law arrangements locally developing an institutional notion of rights (Durmuş, 2020). A first way is to ensure that local governments are not the administration responsible for

¹⁵ <https://plan-einstein.nl/>

¹⁶ <https://skr.se/tjanster/englishpages/activities/localexamplesofactivitiesforintegration/localexamplesofintegrationinitiativesforchildrenyouthsfamiliesandschools/initiativesforchildrenyouthsfamiliesandschools/basicinformationmaterialforunaccompaniedminors.9386.html>

¹⁷ <https://granollers.cat/ajuntament/sportop>

¹⁸ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/grigny%E2%80%99s-mayor-call-local-governments-commit-defend-right-peace-grassroots-global>

¹⁹ <https://www.gfmd.org/pfp/ppd/11547>

²⁰ <https://www.accioncontraelhambre.org/en/keeping-cities-clean-women-refugees-working-benefit-their-communities-jordan>

²¹ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/jugendcollege-training-and-education-young-migrants-vienna>

²² https://www.barcelona.cat/infobarcelona/en/barcelona-discrimination-observatory-2019-who-discriminates-why-and-where-2_955484.html

²³ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/guaranteeing-universal-rights-city-crossed-migratory-routes-nadors-local-action>

²⁴ <http://www.snapshotsfromtheborders.eu/>


²⁵ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/media/pair-believe.page>

²⁶ <https://montevideo.gub.uy/noticias/servicios-sociales/presentamos-la-campana-por-el-mes-de-la-afrodescendencia>

²⁷ <https://festivalham.com/en/>

²⁸ https://www.nuernberg.de/internet/menschenrechte_e/antidiskriminierung_unternehmerpreis_en.html

²⁹ https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/03/18/news/torino_l_antirazzismo_diventa_un_bene_comune_come_l_acqua_e_i_parchi-251584598/



discriminating (Grigolo, 2009). In order to avoid this, cities carry out local human rights review strategies (as **Vienna**³⁰ exemplifies) or establish offices for non-discrimination and ombudsperson institutions allowing residents to claim their rights (as seen in **Seoul**³¹, **Bogotá**³² and **New York**³³).

Local governments also focused on improving migrant residents' overall "user experience" with regards to interacting with public administration. Cities like **Gdansk**³⁴ have advanced a service counter system at the City Hall level and an Immigrant Information and Support Center in order to make sure migrant residents are able to safely get all the answers they need with regards to local life. In order to tackle language barriers, the **Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities** provides thematic material to support social workers and municipal staff working with unaccompanied minors³⁵. Other local governments focused on raising migrants' awareness on how to access rights in a practical way and at all levels of administration, by producing, as **Grenoble**, local guides and practical toolkits³⁶.

Another strategy of ensuring immigrant inclusion in the granting of rights is through the creation of local human rights charters that catalogue the rights available to all residents in spite of their administrative status (Guillén, 2006), as adopted by cities like **Montreal**³⁷ and **Mexico City**³⁸. Since 1998, almost 400 municipalities adhered to the **European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City**, which recognizes how "good administration of cities requires respect for and guarantee of human rights for all inhabitants without exception" and that "the rights contained in this apply to all person who inhabit the signatory cities, irrespective of their nationality, henceforth known as citizens".

A final set of measures refers to how a number of local governments have provided residents with a status that unlocks access to city services. This more obvious dimension of urban citizenship manifests in a number of different ways, including granting a formal residency or a local identity card. One of the most formalized examples of this system is the 'padrón' system followed by Spanish cities. **Barcelona** implemented in 2019 a "Document de veïnatge"³⁹ initiative similar in functions and purposes to a local ID card targeting migrants in an irregular administrative situation in particular. Similar schemes are also followed in the US cities like **New York** under the municipal ID card title⁴⁰. Through a municipal service, **Atlanta** supports migrant residents in their national citizenship application process⁴¹.

³⁰ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/look-vienna%E2%80%99s-human-rights-system-interview-human-rights-commissioner-shams-asadi> and <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-shams-asadi-human-rights-commissioner>

³¹ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/seoul%E2%80%99s-quest-bring-human-rights-closer-citizens-lives-interview-human-rights>

³² <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/bogot%C3%A1-%E2%80%99social-control%E2%80%9D-mechanism-promotes-transparency-and-citizen-participation>

³³ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/index.page>

³⁴ <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj0frp8iuAhWGa8AKHWk0A5sQFjAAegQIAxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gdansk.pl%2Fpobierz%2F82848%2FImmigrant-Integration-Model&usg=AOvVaw1NtueZ1Mu5yvxV5jbOWgdI>

³⁵ <https://skr.se/tjanster/englishpages/activities/localexamplesofactivitiesforintegration/localexamplesofintegrationinitiativesforchildrenyouthsfamiliesandschools/initiativesforchildrenyouthsfamiliesandschools/thematicmaterialforpeopleworkingwithunaccompaniedyouths.9384.html>

³⁶ <https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/grenoble-promotes-notion-inclusive-citizenship-through-participation-and-human>


³⁷ <https://montreal.ca/en/topics/montreal-charter-rights-and-responsibilities>

³⁸ <https://www.cndh.org.mx/derechos-humanos/derechos-de-las-personas-migrantes>

³⁹ <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/novaciutadania/es/tramites>

⁴⁰ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/idnyc/about/about.page>

⁴¹ <https://www.welcomingatlanta.com/citizenship/>



4. Institutional arrangements are key: Local governments can bring together contributions by governments and social actors

A brief remark should be made at this point with regards to the fundamental role played by institutional cooperation in advancing the notion of urban citizenship. Indeed, most of the local governments initiatives explored in the previous section are based on positive cooperation schemes with other stakeholders - local associations, civil society, researchers, entrepreneurs, regional and national governments - harnessing complementarity.

With regards to cooperation with civil society, a good assessment on this matter was already produced by the 2019 MC2CM Peer Learning event of Sfax, which highlighted civil society key contributions in areas like supporting advocacy and awareness raising process, access to basic services and social inclusion opportunities as well as producing knowledge and data relevant to local governments' work on migration. Following the scheme proposed by the peer review document, many existing mechanisms for cooperation between local governments and civil society initiatives around the notion of urban citizenship are based on jointly developing local policies and service provision mechanisms, but also coordinating, sharing information and thinking of integrated interventions between institutions.

Other good examples of coordination exist in the field of multi-level governance, comprising successful cooperation schemes between local and regional government in the field of producing local ID cards and other institutional arrangements in the field of citizenship rights. Regional governments and other sub-national administrations have also played a key role in supporting and scaling-up existing local government initiatives, creating working methodologies and useful materials to reinforce local strategies in the field of inclusion. In other contexts, local governments also found ways to challenge discriminatory laws or establish agreements by engaging with national representatives and delegates.

5. Guiding questions for the Peer Learning

- What is the scope and overarching value or goal of urban citizenship? What opportunities and responsibilities constitute urban citizenship?
- In a context where transnational mobility has greatly accelerated on a global scale, how can the notion of urban citizenship promote the inclusion of the most excluded?
- How can a right to the city for all be guaranteed when the lack of legal status puts a barrier in access to fundamental rights and public services for migrant residents?
- How can urban citizenship contribute to tackle inequalities at a territorial level?
- How to develop social cohesion, strengthen the sense of local belonging and foster the participation of migrants by reformulating the debate on citizenship?
- How can urban citizenship promote an alternative form of participation and belonging to the city, allowing spaces for recognition of otherness and cultural diversity?

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