

For a better participation of cities in regional migration dialogues

By Alexandre Porteret

The continued increase in the proportion of the world's population living in urban areas has placed cities at the forefront for managing migration and its current challenges. Cities are now key actors and partners of choice for regional and inter-regional dialogues on migration, and taking their priorities into account could be beneficial to the migration dialogues in several ways.

Key actors on migration

With nearly one in five migrants now living in one of the world's twenty largest cities, migration is more than ever an urban phenomenon. The role of cities in migration management is likely to become increasingly central as the urbanisation rate continues to rise, as is being observed each year on a global scale.

Cities represent a potential source of knowledge and experience for the different regional and inter-regional migration dialogues, in particular those dialogues that cover regions characterised by strong urbanisation or an urbanisation that is destined to evolve rapidly in the coming years, such as the Rabat and Khartoum Processes or the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA).

Africa is indeed the continent that will experience the fastest urban growth rate in the world by 2050, with a projected average annual growth rate of about 1% over the period 2015-2050. As shown by the [Africapolis](#) initiative, a platform supported by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) which collects data from nearly 7,500 cities in Africa, the continent's 20 largest cities alone already represented nearly 130 million people in 2015.

This rapid urbanisation is inherently destined to influence the migration context of regions where several regional and inter-regional migration dialogues are present. West Africa, a region until now characterised by a relatively low rate of urbanisation compared to other regions of Africa or Europe, and where both the [Rabat Process](#) and MIDWA are present, will see more than half of its inhabitants living in cities by 2024. In line with this trend, the average urbanisation rate in the region covered by the Rabat Process (an intergovernmental dialogue bringing together 28 African and 30 European countries), is predicted to increase from about 64% at the end of the second quarter of 2018 to more than 70% by 2035.

Inviting cities to join discussions on migration would help regional dialogues to recognise the complex relationship that links migration and urbanisation, and to learn about the migration

challenges faced by cities as a result of the increasing rate of urbanisation in the regions they cover. By better including cities in their activities, regional dialogues could also respond to the need – expressed by cities – to better contribute to regional and global discussions on migration.

A need expressed by international networks of cities

The willingness of cities to be involved in intergovernmental discussions on migration has been demonstrated by several international networks of agglomerations in recent years. The 8th edition of the Africities Summit, organised by United Cities and Local Governments Africa in November 2018, led for instance to the adoption of the Charter of Local and Subnational Governments of Africa on Migration, in which they called for their effective participation in cooperation on migration.

Recommendations were also made to this end within the framework of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration ([MC2CM](#)) initiative, which aims to contribute to improving migration governance at city level, and in which cities such as Tangiers, Lyon and Madrid are involved. In a set of policy recommendations adopted in Beirut in 2017, MC2CM city representatives also stressed the importance of joint global and regional programmes on migrants, as well as the need to focus on local authorities and urban development policies.

The issue of including city representatives in global discussions on migration has also been one of the topics discussed within the Mayoral Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development, since its launch in 2013. The first edition of the forum was held in Barcelona in 2014 with the support of UCLG, which today represents over 240,000 cities and metropolises and about five billion people worldwide. At this forum, the participating cities adopted the [Call of Barcelona](#), in which they asked the international community, for the first time, to consider cities as key actors in the development of migration policies.

Cities and the Global Compact on Migration

The adoption of the [Berlin Declaration](#) at the 2017 edition of the Mayoral Forum then marked the determination of mayors to contribute to the negotiations of the Global Compact on Migration. The Berlin Forum was followed in November of the same year by the Global Conference on Cities and Migration, jointly organised by the IOM, UN-Habitat and UCLG. It was during this event, organised in Mechelen to welcome the integration policies of this Belgian city, which is home to around 138 nationalities for a total of 86,000 inhabitants (and whose mayor, Bart Somers, was awarded the prize of "Best Mayor in the World" in 2016), that the [Mechelen Declaration](#) was adopted.

This text, which covers many themes common to migration and urbanisation, is one of the major contributions of cities to the Global Compact, and reflects the willingness of representatives from more than 50 cities to participate in existing regional and global mechanisms on migration. The genuine need for cities to be recognised for their role in managing the impact of migration is also at the heart of the Declaration on Cities Working Together for Migrants and Refugees, adopted at the fifth Forum in Marrakesh in December 2018 as the final contribution of mayors to the Global Compact. This declaration was presented two days later by the Mayor of Montreal, Valérie Plante, to the national leaders present in Morocco for the adoption of the Compact.

The inclusion of cities in the Global Compact, which marks the culmination of a long consultation process involving UCLG, should be welcomed. The Global Compact advocates for an approach that mobilises all public authorities and society as a whole, and underlines the central role of local authorities in achieving several of its objectives, particularly with regard to the provision of information for migrants, accessibility of regular migration channels, assistance for migrants in vulnerable situations, and integration and social cohesion.

Towards better participation of cities in regional discussions on migration?

The Global Compact also paves the way for better participation of cities in regional and interregional dialogues on migration, calling for the use of local authorities to identify needs and opportunities for international cooperation, as well as for their views and priorities to be taken into account in development strategies, programmes and plans on migration. The priorities of the Global Forum on Migration and Development for 2019 also illustrate this trend. Indeed, Ecuador, as the new Chair of this platform which has contributed to the negotiations of the Global Compact since 2016, has included among its thematic priorities the issue of supporting cities of arrival through policy coherence and multi-stakeholder partnerships, in particular to understand the role that national governments and other partners can play in facilitating the success of cities in terms of reception and integration.

It is therefore necessary, in order not to leave these calls unanswered, and to align with the objectives of the Global Compact on Migration, to encourage regional dialogues to better involve cities in the discussions they organise.

Cities are destined to remain, because of their growing attractiveness, key players in migration. They are at the same time major beneficiaries of this phenomenon and among the first to face the challenges it entails. The experience, knowledge and good practices developed by cities in the field of migration are all elements on which regional dialogues could build, and which could feed into intergovernmental discussions on migration at both regional and inter-regional levels. The discussions would be benefitting from the contributions of cities

participating in the debates as representatives of international agglomeration networks, or as members of national delegations that are partners of the dialogues. Cities, on the other hand, could take advantage of their participation in these exchanges to share their points of view and bring the discussions closer to reality at the local level.

The potential added value of improved participation of cities in joint discussions on migration is already being evident for in some regional dialogues. For example, in May 2018, the partners of the Rabat Process who signed the new strategic cooperation framework of the dialogue (the [Marrakesh Action Plan](#)) committed themselves to building on the achievements of existing city networks, in particular through the organisation of peer-to-peer meetings involving competent local authorities and cities in the region of the dialogue.

One of the main objectives shared by the different regional dialogues active in the field of migration is to reach a common understanding of this phenomenon. In order to do this, discussions must encompass all aspects of migration. Initiatives to facilitate the participation of cities in regional discussions on migration should be encouraged in this regard, so as to foster better understanding of urbanisation and its dynamics among policy makers and international cooperation actors on migration.

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The views expressed here are those of the author, and not necessarily those of ICMPD.