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CITIES AS THE 'CENTRE STAGE' FOR COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND SAFEGUARDING HUMAN RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS

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Following up on the first informal thematic session entitled “Human rights of all migrants, social inclusion, cohesion and all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance that took place 8-9 May in Geneva, we are featuring selected examples and illustrations in this blog. We feature selected local level examples and illustrations to offer inspiration and help inform the discussion and debate on how the global compact for migration can set out to address its commitments in the fields of human rights, social inclusion and cohesion, battling discrimination and intolerance.

1. Human Rights for all migrants

Even though human rights are codified in a number of international, regional and national treaties and laws, their application remains piecemeal. Migrants face additional barriers that infringe upon their full enjoyment of fundamental rights. These include structural discrimination in host societies, lack of awareness of these rights and migration status but also the resources and capacity of central, regional and local administrations to enact these rights.

The application of rights for migrants is particularly challenging in a context of “mixed migration” where flows of refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and others converge to create a group with common basic needs but fragmented in the rights and entitlements they can enjoy in their host countries.

The global compact should ensure the respect of existing legal instruments and help address barriers to their implementation on the ground. It should also seek to address disparities and fragmentation in enjoyment of fundamental rights among migrants, with particular attention to vulnerable groups such as victims of trafficking, children, women and young men.

Migrant rights are an integral component of a broader human rights and development agenda. Below are concrete examples and illustrations of how human rights for migrants are being

implemented at the local and national level, as well as an existing tool that is serving to address an implementation gap at the local level:

- In 2014, the city of Vienna declared itself a city of human rights. This action was the result of an extensive needs assessment and consultative process with stakeholders across the city. This political decision of the city ensures that it goes beyond and above its traditional role as duty bearer to ensure every level of local policy is implemented through a human rights lens. This helps achieve a holistic approach to effective rights implementation on the ground. Vulnerable groups such as migrants are a specific target group addressed by this policy approach.
- The [Jordan Response Plan for the Syrian crisis](#) seeks to strike a balance between the needed emergency relief for the immediate needs of Syrian refugees living and transiting through its territory as well as long-term development trajectory of the country. As such, it seeks to address structural long-term issues including rapid urbanisation, resources scarcity and need for housing and transport infrastructure.
- The [Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City](#), developed by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, serves as a tool to localise the human rights agenda. It offers concrete steps that can be taken by local authorities going beyond fundamental freedoms to enact rights in the fields of cultural diversity and housing for the most vulnerable groups in the city, including migrants.

2. Social inclusion and cohesion

Human rights are a basic tenet of social inclusion. Notwithstanding, while human rights are codified in international, regional or national laws, social inclusion is a remit of the local level. In increasingly diverse societies, social inclusion and social cohesion policies need to create conditions allowing migrants to fully participate in the economy and to foster exchange and interaction between different social groups.

National policies in the fields of employment and social protection, education and civic participation can contribute to the creation of such shared norms and values, for example by granting of voting rights for immigrants and promoting dual citizenship. As the main setting where newcomers arrive and settle, cities represent the centre stage where social interaction unfolds, leading to inclusion or exclusion. Major urban areas, with increasing diversity and constant change in demography and landscape, are particularly affected by the phenomenon of social exclusion, which can arise out of legal, economic, social and cultural circumstances

of migrants. The risks of exclusion are manifold and can generate civil discontent, conflict and even unrest.

Beyond the risks posed by the threat of exclusion, the positive levers of inclusion of urban and regional development and growth must be widely advertised, to shift the balance in the narrative of migration.

- The city of Tangiers has set out a process of mainstreaming migration governance into the policy of the city to ensure that there is coordination and application of frameworks and charters ratified by the city. One of the measures taken by the city is to support civil society groups, including migrant organisations, by financial means to empower grassroots organisations that set out to address needs and identified gaps, including increasing service take-up among migrants and combatting prejudices through the promotion of a positive image of migration.
- The municipality of Madrid encourages citizen coexistence through the use and construction of public space that promotes inter-cultural dialogue and transcends a vision of shared multiculturalism. This is done through a participatory process which involves the community in devising a shared space. The process is mediated by local public officials and undergoes constant evaluation at each stage of the process to ensure the actions achieve desired outcomes and objectives.

3. Discrimination, racism and intolerance

Just as human rights represent a basic precept for social inclusion, discrimination and racism are the other side of the coin – acting as consequent barriers to social inclusion of migrants. Beyond national tools, the European Union offers a promising example of a [regional legislative framework for combatting discrimination](#) – despite existing shortcomings.

Moreover, the current discourse surrounding migration has taken a dramatically negative turn in the last decade both within Europe and internationally, demanding a review on how information pertaining to migration is gathered, shared and disseminated amongst different actors, which greatly affects both migration policy and public perception. The Global Compact represents an opportunity to address the lacuna of tools available to redress and report discrimination and racism, promote evidence-based discourse on migration, while also addressing the root causes of prejudice and intolerance.

- Lisbon Municipality provides a community space for residents and youth from peripheral neighbourhoods with high concentration of migrants to gather and

exchange. The aim is for local citizens to participate in the social, political and cultural life of the city. The centre and services provided serve to act a bridge for inclusion and active participation of the most vulnerable groups in the every-day life of the city.

- The European Union-funded [Interactive Map on Migration \(i-Map\)](#) is a web-based information and knowledge platform which aims to enhance and facilitate information exchange and contribute to a more balanced narrative on migration. It collects relevant information and data about migration and flows and makes this readily available and accessible to relevant decision-makers.
- The [Migration Media Award](#) recognises and rewards excellence in journalism and reporting on migration. Launched by ICMPD under the aegis of the Maltese Presidency of the EU, the award aims to further improve the quality of journalistic work and reinforce the positive role which media can play when it comes to influencing the current narrative on migration. Our recent [study on 17 countries in and around the Mediterranean](#) reveals that journalists are often poorly informed about the complex nature of migration and newsrooms are also vulnerable to pressure, manipulation and hate speech by some political elites or voices on social media networks.

4. Implementation through good governance and partnership

For the global compact for migration to achieve its desired objectives and become a useful tool to combat discrimination and safeguard human rights of migrants, operative mechanisms for dialogue, cooperation and partnership among relevant stakeholders will need to be put in place.

- The compact could help disentangle the principle of subsidiarity which governs areas of responsibility of national, regional and local governments in respective areas of human rights, social inclusion and discrimination. An open dialogue needs to be established to determine the right level of competence to address these areas and set out strategies to tackle gaps in responsibility.
- Regional integration processes, such as EU anti-discrimination and human rights acquis, must be incorporated into any global framework on migration. The implications of regionalisation on migration, as is the case in Europe, must be highlighted and further explored for the positive elements that it can bring in the process of embracing common principles and values on human rights and migration.
- Inter-institutional cooperation among different administrations must be ensured. Beyond global frameworks such as the Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda, coherence must be sought among the New York Declaration commitments and the

enactment of policy areas like security, finance and others that may have detrimental impact on equality and perception of migration which are root causes of prejudice and exclusion.

- Mindful of the reality on the ground, the complementarity between the two global compacts must be guaranteed; particularly in the light of the counterproductive effect fragmented approaches can have on social cohesion in host communities.
- Building evidence is a key element of the compact's long-term success. Collection and compilation of existing data on migration, disaggregated not only by characteristics of target group but also by local geographic regions can provide a better insight into the local realities of migration and the solutions to challenges on the ground. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators for integration and social cohesion must be accounted for in the evaluation of longitudinal policy implementation.
- Existing migration dialogues and regional processes, such as the Budapest Process and Rabat Process, can serve as a source of inspiration for new migration actors to gather in the spirit of true partnership and cooperation.

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by world leaders in September 2016 is a welcome first step into the establishment of a more comprehensive, cohesive and effective global migration governance mechanism. The ensuing process to develop a Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration represents a unique opportunity to translate the commitments of the Declaration into solid, effective mechanisms to address migration in a concerted and systematic fashion. It is also an opportunity to challenge uninformed and provisional practices in favour of evidence, partnership-based approaches that will yield the desired results and benefits to make a marked contribution to migration governance at a global and regional level. The process started in April this year with thematic and regional consultations that will culminate in a stocktaking meeting in Mexico in November. In this period, six informal thematic sessions in New York, Geneva and Vienna will address a cluster of topics and themes listed in Annex II of the New York Declaration.

Related Links:

[New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#)

[Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration](#)

[Annex II of the New York Declaration](#)

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