

MC2CM DAYS: Local authorities improve migration governance

20-24 September 2021 in Brussels (EU quarter)

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20 September 2021, Brussels

Dear Commissioner Várhelyi, Secretary General Saiz, Director Mohd Sharif, Dear Mayors, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to open today's "High-Level Dialogue on Renewed partnerships and migration governance" in the framework of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Initiative. At ICMPD we feel very honoured that this conference will bring together so many of our friends and partners in person but also in a virtual format across countries and continents. Of course I want to take the opportunity and thank our partners and donors, the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the representatives of the 22 Euro-Mediterranean cities. Your continued support is the basis for the success of this initiative and it will be the basis for the success of this conference.

When the City-to-City Migration Initiative started in 2015, it wanted to respond to a basic fact. Migration is an urban phenomenon. It is mostly at the local level, at the level of cities, where the reality of migration plays out and affects peoples' life, whether they are newly arrived migrants or long-term residents. Cities were always at the forefront in terms of the management of new arrivals, the furthering of immigrant integration and the promotion of social cohesion between all resident populations. They always had to address immediate challenges, they had to respond quickly and they had to deliver on the ground. We can conclude that cities were very successful in this respect. And I think we all agree that cities have gathered very specific know-how that has huge benefits for migration governance within countries but also when it comes to international cooperation.

The growing recognition of local authorities and cities as key actors in migration governance is one of the most important developments in recent years. This recognition is not only true in terms of national governments and regional frameworks realising that they cannot act successfully without the local level. It is also about cities recognising and embracing their role as agents in migration governance. As one of the biggest political challenges of our time, migration is too complex and nuanced to be addressed by one nation, one ministry or one city alone. All levels of governance have to work together. The local level has to play its part in a

functioning migration governance system. Conversely, cities have to be acknowledged as a key player that migration governance relies upon. Local authorities are much more than just implementing partners of national migration policies. They also have the ability to contribute to shaping these migration policies.

In order to benefit from this know-how and to make better migration policy a reality, we need enhanced dialogue and exchange between all political levels. And this is exactly what this conference will try to achieve. It will discuss issues related to the inclusion of migrants and refugees at the local level, their access to services and the link between local urban planning and the promotion of social cohesion. It will look at private sector engagement and labour integration. Immigrants need jobs, and local labour markets need diversity of skills and knowledge to ensure their growth and prosperity. It will share experiences on promoting balanced migration narratives at the local level. Perceptions and attitudes towards newcomers are crucial for the success of all migration policies but even more so in cities, where local populations and migrants have to interact at a daily basis. And last but not least, it will look at the issue of gender and migration and discuss how cities can enhance the protection and inclusion of migrant women, spur gender-responsive programmes and develop policies that have migrant women as main beneficiaries.

In all of this, the conference will draw upon best practices presented by the Mediterranean City-to-City partners, and by a broad range of governmental, local and non-governmental actors, who have gathered extensive experience in the field.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the last one and a half years the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us once more of the deep links between all our societies, our economies and our people. It has disrupted global mobility in ways that were unthinkable since the fall of the Iron Curtain. It has affected all of us, but it has affected migrants and their families even more. Millions of people got stranded, could not reach their place of residence or had to return to their home countries while losing their jobs and income opportunities. At the same time global displacement continued to grow and the recent developments in Afghanistan remind us that the challenge will get even bigger in the months and years to come. As a result, migration governance will also become even more difficult than in the past. We will need all levels of governance to take part, to exchange, to learn and to cooperate with each another.

I am convinced that the next four days will make a very important contribution in this regard and provide equally important inputs to the further development of migration governance within the City-to-City framework and beyond. I wish you all very fruitful discussions and a successful conference.

Thank you very much.