



Press Release

In landmark GFMD Summit, cities join national governments to discuss migration governance

Local leaders talk migration governance with national governments and ask for improved local-national policy coordination, more robust legal frameworks that protect migrants and empower cities, and increased access to international funding.

GENEVA, 29 January 2021 - From 18-26 January, over 90 local and regional government representatives from 48 cities and city networks from across the globe attended the [13th Global Forum for Migration and Development \(GFMD\) Summit](#).

Speaking alongside national governments, cities shared the pragmatic and bold actions they are taking locally to include migrants, especially in response to COVID-19, whether by providing equal access to testing and treatment, direct cash assistance regardless of status, or sanitation services in underserved neighbourhoods.

Cities called for national governments to improve or establish local-national policy coordination mechanisms, especially in times of crisis; to ensure cities have adequate legal and budgetary mandates to protect migrants; and to change international funding and financing mechanisms so that cities can access urgently needed resources and better serve all those in their communities, including migrants. These calls are critical as 95% of all COVID-19 cases occur in urban areas — where the majority of migrants, refugees, and internally displaced live — and cities globally could face a 25% loss of resources in 2021 because of COVID-19.

Hosted under the Chairmanship of the **United Arab Emirates**, this year's GFMD marked its most inclusive Summit ever — offering local and national governments a true opportunity to come together in common dialogue.

The Summit brought over 2000 participants together virtually to discuss complex issues such as gaps in migrant protection, labour migration, and irregular migration. Over 840 national government representatives from 116 States attended. **The GFMD Mayors Mechanism secured access for over 90 local and regional governments to join the discussions as active participants, including 25 local leaders as official panellists speaking in 18 of the Summit's formal events.**

As an integral part of the GFMD programme, the Mayors Mechanism hosted a dialogue between local and national governments on '[Enabling Local Solutions for Inclusive COVID-19 Response and Recovery](#)' on Friday 22 January. A comprehensive overview of this session, including a detailed report, video clips, and pictures are available via the [International Institute for Sustainable Development \(IISD\)](#).

The Mayors Mechanism, together with the governments of Canada, Ecuador and IOM, also hosted a [GFMD Side Event](#) on balancing narratives on migration, and discussed how campaigns like [It Takes A Community](#) can build partnerships and contribute to more welcoming communities.



Five priorities emerged throughout the seven-day Summit:

- 1. Ensure access to services for all, including for those in an irregular situation or without documentation.** Providing access to services is part and parcel of what it means to manage a city. In practice, cities need an enabling national legal environment, resources, localized data, and outreach networks to make equal access to services a lived reality. Cities called on national governments to address these needs, for example through expanding pathways and regularization programmes and to recognise such programs as smart policy tools to ensure everyone's health and safety in a pandemic and beyond.
- 2. Balance narratives on migration to build inclusive communities.** Protecting migrants from discrimination, and creating stronger, balanced, and more resilient narratives on migration is part of the mandate of cities to ensure everyone can feel safe. Engaging with the general public and addressing their real concerns is key to achieving this goal. Cities call on national governments and others to join this effort, through peer learning and multi-actor partnerships.
- 3. Promote the economic inclusion of migrants as an important driver of sustainable development.** Cities are important partners in building effective labour migration policies and skills matching, in particular when it comes to protecting migrants in the informal sector and enabling migrant entrepreneurship and inclusion. They help gather local data and are well placed to connect different stakeholders. Cities call on national governments to partner with them so policies can be rooted in these local realities and can benefit from existing expertise and networks.
- 4. Set up and strengthen local-national policy coordination mechanism on migration.** Cities and States illustrated that local-national coordination mechanisms could make it easier for national governments and cities to manage migration together, especially when faced with a crisis like COVID-19. Such mechanisms are important tools to ensure migrants are included in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, cities call on national governments for increased, better and sustained local-national coordination and communication structures.
- 5. Increase municipal access to international funding.** Cities are being asked to do more with less. This was true before the pandemic, but the economic and social impact from the crisis makes this even more apparent. In 2021 alone, African cities are projected to lose up to 65 percent of their revenues. Globally, cities may face a 25 percent loss, which will and already has had huge effects on those who need it most. Cities have called for increased access to international funding and have stressed the importance of innovative funding schemes, including the MMC-led [Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response](#) and the important precedent of the UN [Migration Multi Partner Trust Fund](#), which includes city-led organizations as part of its Steering Committee.

Cities expressed readiness to continue to engage in the GFMD going forward, and to work with the GFMD Steering Group, working groups, and stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, to advance these thematic priorities through 2021.



About the GFMD Mayors Mechanism:

Established in 2018, the Mayors Mechanism – co-steered [by United Cities and Local Governments \(UCLG\)](#), [the Mayors Migration Council \(MMC\)](#) and [the International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) – aims at including local and regional governments within the GFMD process, bringing their voices and expertise into State-led deliberations, and intensifying the dialogue between different levels of government and different stakeholder groups.

More information:

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ANNEX 1: Quotes

Emilia Saiz, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments: *‘As the level of government closest to the people, local governments have a key role in protecting everyone in our communities. They need to be involved in decisions that will affect inhabitants of our cities and countries. Global decisions need to take local realities into account. We need a new multilateralism that reflects that. We need a seat at the table.’*

Vittoria Zanuso, Executive Director, Mayors Migration Council: *‘Municipal budgets are not immune to the huge economic shock unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021 alone, African cities could lose up to 65 percent of their revenues. Globally, cities may face a 25 percent loss. It’s time for the international community to show up for cities and provide local governments with the financial support they need to deliver critical services to all of their residents.’*

Antonio Vitorino, Director General of the International Organisation for Migration: *‘The Mayors Mechanism has led to the formal inclusion of mayors’ voices in the GFMD. It is through this platform that local governments have a seat at the table of migration governance, alongside national governments, civil society and the private sector – not only as implementors, but as full-fledged migration governance actors.’*

Carola Gunnarsson, Lord Mayor of Sala, Sweden: *‘We understand migration as a status, not as nature. Migrants are neighbours first. They live in our city, they work in our city, and they need to use the same public services as any other citizen.’*



Madelaine Alfelor Gazman, Mayor of Iriga, Philippines: *'As local leaders, the GFMD provides a unique space for us, to move forward in regard to advancing a joint policy on migration. Its inclusivity and informality are essential to build partnerships and identify new ideas for action and collaboration. It has also allowed us to exchange, identify synergies with national governments, civil society, and the private sector, to improve our coordination at all levels.'*

Mohamed Saadieh, Mayor of Deirnbouh, Lebanon: *'Local governments have been playing a major role to curtail the spread of the virus. Cities should be able to use international emergency assistance to increase direct support for vulnerable households, including migrants. We need more cooperation and coordination between donors, international NGOs and local governments to develop tailored assistance programmes.'*

Salvatore Martello, Mayor of Lampedusa and Linosa, Italy: *'Migration is part of humanity's DNA. I remain convinced of the importance of the principles contained in the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – migratory flows must be managed, not stopped.'*

Ali A'Saf, Head of the Fundraising Department, Sahab Municipality, Jordan: *'We need to protect our people from the pandemic. When I say our people, I refer to people from all backgrounds, whether they are Jordanian, Syrian, Egyptian or other nationalities. We have an urban vision for the future, and we demonstrate the ability as a local government to care about everyone's health.'*

Bitta Mostofi, Commissioner of the Office of Immigrant Affairs, New York City, United States: *'By connecting our communities with information about free COVID-19 testing and care, rental and food assistance, [and] immigration legal help, we work to ensure they can seek the care they need without fear of immigration consequences. While we advocate for a comprehensive recovery that prioritizes the needs of our most vulnerable neighbours, we want all New Yorkers to be empowered by knowledge about their right to get support.'*

Gabriella De Francesco, Councillor, City of Mechelen, Belgium: *'We live in times of polarization and global changes: our usual way of doing things needs to change, and we can do this through story telling. People make the city, and people like stories. When you tell stories, people see and relate to the story and the human being in it, it is not the differences they see.'*

Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General of UCLG Africa: *'We hope that it is definitively admitted that migrants leave a territory or a community to settle in another one, therefore communities and territories are essential in the issue of migration and in the implementation of the GCM. Migration is both an opportunity and a challenge: it is a challenge when it is approached only from the security angle, when the means of reception are insufficient at the local level and create tension with local populations, leading to situations of xenophobia and violence. And this happens at the community level'*

Laura Gonzales-Murphy, Director, Office of New Americans, New York State, United States: *'We as local and regional governments need to balance the narrative by including the citizenry and reassuring them that they will not be left behind. We need to foster the one-on-one relationship between newcomers and communities receiving them. To create change, we need to avoid national resentment and be inclusive.'*



Manja Kargbo, Team Lead for the Mayor's Delivery Unit, Freetown, Sierra Leone: *'Cities increasingly work in city-to-city partnerships for skills matching. In a programme we lead with Milan – the Growth and Solidarity Initiative – we are trying to change the dynamic between Africa and Europe, to change the narrative and to come together as equals, city-to-city.'*

Veronique Lamontagne, Strategic Planning Manager, Office of the Director General, City of Montréal, Canada: *'With the COVID-19 crisis, we realized that as cities, we could effectively include migrants in our response by prioritizing actions in three areas: an inclusive approach, recognizing and capitalizing on migrants' contributions to recovery, and working towards fair and ethical recruitment.'*

Ahmed Skim, Director of Migration Affairs, Ministry Delegate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates, Morocco: *'Cities and regions are fundamental players in the management of migration. The Moroccan government is developing a strategic vision in consultation with cities, regions and other stakeholders to ensure that the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum can be effectively implemented at those levels.'*

Alexandra Young, Director, International Migration Policy, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Government of Canada: *'Only through collaboration between all levels of government can we achieve what we need to build back better. All levels of government have a critical role to play. In Canada we had the advantage to already have strong networks involving the local level in place, which have made us more resilient in responding to COVID-19. Constant and two-way communication is critical to ensure we can inform all levels of governments quickly, but also that we at the Federal level, understand realities on the ground.'*

Bettina Etter, Senior Advisor, Global Migration Governance, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland: *'While urban mobilization and response to COVID at the local level has been tremendous, cities are increasingly asked to do more with less. Local development finance is becoming more important: the sub-national fiscal space is shrinking considerably, while local governments will be the ones to cope with the realities of the pandemic in the long run, in particular secondary and smaller cities. Further partnerships with investors and development actors are needed tackle these challenges. The Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response by the MMC in partnership with UCLG, UN Habitat, IOM, and UNHCR provides the technical support to meet the needs of cities in this crisis. We invite all development partners and national governments to help us reach 22 cities by 2022. It is of utmost importance that cities are not only included as beneficiaries but are included in the design and selection of projects of international funds.'*

H.E. Nasser bin Thani Juma Al Hamli, Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, United Arab Emirates, GFMD 2020 Chair: *'One of our priorities has been to open up the entire GFMD process and summit to delegates from the three GFMD mechanisms, and it has been clear from the discussions this week and throughout the year, that cities have brought fresh energy and new perspectives to the debates. Inclusion of stakeholders will be vital to the future of the GFMD.'*