

MTM – Mediterranean Transit Migration Dialogue

In the last decade migration issues have become a priority area at the top of the European, Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan political agendas. Migration impacts numerous local, national and regional policy fields e.g. economics, politics, social policy and security, and to effectively address its opportunities and challenges, an inter-regional approach has emerged. Regularly developed by countries of origin, transit and destination, this approach is supported by specific agreements, programmes and projects responding to a constantly evolving environment.

In this context, the place of MTM Dialogue is unique. The Dialogue supports the development of an innovative approach in relevant thematic areas: since 2002 it participates in the construction of an inductive environment, for informative discussions on migration issues. It provides a solid platform for the elaboration of new perspectives and the strengthening of information sharing mechanism so far on two main Pillars: “Irregular and mixed migration”, and “Migration and development”.

Since its inception, the platform provides support to participating states and aims to enhance the quality and intensity of their cooperation on migration issues, and prepares the field for the innovative actions. Established initially to support cooperation among Mediterranean countries on transit migration issues, it has progressively expanded its geographical coverage and its thematic areas of concern. It has evolved over the years, actively contributing to strengthen cooperation on migration matters in the Mediterranean region and beyond. Thirteen years after its foundation, 46 countries from Europe, North Africa, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, together with 9 International Organisations, are actively participating in it and have the status of MTM Partner States and Partner Agencies. To ensure a maximisation of exchange and dissemination of information, the MTM has three working languages: Arabic, English and French.

The MTM Dialogue is a complex platform, with an action-oriented approach. The platform main role is to act as a technical support to regional and national migration policies and strategies development. It achieves results through various ways and means: assessment activities; information sharing mechanisms; analysis; dissemination of information; promotion and development of knowledge-based policies; sharing of perceptions, policies, good practices, priorities and needs with counterparts; promoting and implementing projects and training activities; developing innovative tools; identifying new opportunities and challenges.

Basically, the methodology adopted by MTM Dialogue addresses relevant issues in the field of interest of MTM Partner States with a modular approach. It promotes long-term trust-building efforts, facilitates dialogue among Partner States, offers a platform for exchange between States and expert agencies, and implements short- and medium-term projects aimed at informing and supporting the dialogue.

In all activities, the Partner States' concerns are the primary focus, as the platform is service-oriented: participants use it according to their needs. Moreover, Partner Agencies active participation and expertise in fields of interest to the Dialogue bring significant added-value to MTM Partner States: interagency cooperation approach has demonstrated to be beneficial for all participants.

Despite the evident limitations created by the absence of a “classical” political dialogue mandate, as well as the project-based nature of the funding and activities, the dialogue more than a decade-long existence is an achievement in itself.

The Dialogue has been nurtured by supporting initiatives, such as the i-Map , an information sharing platform for key information on migration issues. It developed in 2006 in the framework of the Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM) Dialogue and currently hosts four Migration Dialogues. The i-Map offers different outputs, such as country, route and hub profiles, visualizations, as well as daily news updates via the i-Map news centre. While the profiles provide an overview on migration data and information on the institutional capacities and practices of given countries or regions with regard to their migration management systems, the i-Map News Centre facilitates access to up-to-date information through media articles on the latest developments in the fields of irregular and mixed migration, international protection, labour migration, as well as migration and development. Articles are available in Arabic, English and French.

This embeddedness in dialogues helps providing legitimacy to the information sharing routine and enhances ownership, since partner countries take part in conceptualization process and architecture of the website. The flexibility of the tool also allows the outputs published on the i-Map to be tailored to the specificities of each region, which contribute to making the tool highly relevant for government officials of participating states, which is the main targeted audience.

In the long term, the set-up of a more harmonized and user-friendlier i-Map, which could expand both geographically and thematically, is envisaged. A layer on the local dimension of migration will be incorporated and the target audience will be diversified, with a stronger focus on NGO’s, academia and the wider public.

Another flagship initiative developed in the framework of the MTM Dialogue is the project Strengthening African and Middle-Eastern Diaspora Policy through South-South Exchange (AMEDIP) which successfully concluded at the end of 2014. The AMEDIP constituted the framework for the development of Operational Guidelines for South-South and triangular cooperation.

Lately the MTM Dialogue expanded its activities to encompass the local level, in acknowledgment of the importance of urban migration related issues as well as of mainstreaming migration into local planning.

Increasingly in recent years, the region covered by the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM) has witnessed inward migration flows from neighboring countries and further afield, transforming these countries of origin and transit into countries of destination, and presenting new challenges in a migration context of increasing complexity.

Migration, integration, inclusion and the protection of migrants’ rights have hitherto been largely regulated and debated at state level, with states developing policies tailored to their countries’ needs as a whole. Thus, the central role of states as main actors in migration management and dialogue somewhat neglects a very basic fact of international migration - in reality, migratory flows, whether rural-to-urban or urban-to-urban, link cities across and between regions. Many migratory processes take place in a series of stages, from the region of origin, via a local city and a large entrepôt city, to a city of final destination. This means that the lived migration experience takes place in the context of the city, rather than the state, of transit or destination.

The existing city administrations in the Southern Mediterranean are, however, currently facing challenges to deal with the protection of these migrants' rights. Standards on migration governance, including reception and integration need to be developed. The absence of such standards and the lack of access to basic services and rights at the city level create an environment of exclusion or even hostility towards migrants. This can also lead to ghettoization and the attendant problems of increased poverty. Anti-migrant sentiment, lack of basic support for integration and vulnerability as a result of denied access to human rights must be perceived as main push factors for onward migration, which as a rule has to rely on the services of human smugglers and/or involves the risk of falling victim to human traffickers.

In this context, MTM Partner States have called for the Secretariat of the Dialogue to explore innovative dimensions to generate or further strengthen cooperation and partnerships between relevant migration management actors. Some Partner States underlined the importance of exploring ways and means of incorporating these highly relevant actors in the debate and in policy-making.

Some cities in Europe with longer histories of immigration have longer experiences in local-level migration planning, including the development of precise integration plans. Cities in Southern countries may have to address the more basic needs of immigrants, such as water supply and sanitation, electricity, healthcare, education and other basic services. Still, they will benefit from this expertise when adapting lessons learned to the particular challenges for migration planning, in relation to both institutional set-ups and concrete procedures.

The three years City-to-City project started in 2015 with the overall objective to contribute to improved migration governance at local level in the Southern Mediterranean region, including access to human rights.

In order for an appropriate migration governance to be drawn up and for it to be effectively implemented and to guarantee a holistic approach, it is crucial to involve the relevant stakeholders at city level in the process from its inception. Therefore, the broad target audience of the project will comprise city governments, including representatives from relevant departments of city administration involved in thematic issues (e.g. healthcare, education, housing, urban planning, community participation, labour and employment) or dealing with vulnerable groups (e.g. youth, victims of trafficking, refugees and asylum seekers, IDPs), local civil society organisations, immigration associations, trade unions, employers' confederations and other stakeholders, who will participate in this project throughout its duration and will be the key contributors in terms of the content of the migration profiles. They will also have responsibility for the adoption of the city priority papers on migration planning, and will attend the regional events of the project. Continuous information exchange will also be ensured through the i-Map platform.

A more open and more equal city greatly benefits local economies, all city residents - regardless of their origins - and the country as a whole. In this sense, cities can share their experience and expertise in migration planning. The proposed city-to-city action will place the migrant at the centre of all discussions and outputs, addressing the specific needs of minorities in cities experiencing migration. The dialogue, profiles and priority papers will all take into account the gender dimension of migration, and the increasing feminisation of migration flows, focusing on the increased challenges faced by female migrants, including exclusion from fundamental rights and vulnerability to trafficking. The particular rights of children as migrants will also be taken into account. This is an innovative concept which draws on existing experience in national and regional-level dialogue on

migration, adding a further layer at city level where the practical access to rights takes place. The establishment of this city-to-city dialogue addresses the need to establish dialogue structures at city level. Effective dialogue and research structures exist at a regional and national level, while the local level urgently needs to be addressed, which is what this action seeks to resolve.