

Concept note

Global Conference on Cities and Migration

Hosted by the City of Mechelen and

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Belgian Federal Government

16 – 17 November 2017

Introduction

On 19 of September 2016, the Heads of States and Governments and High representatives adopted the political “**New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants**” which calls for an international conference on migration in 2018, for states to consider a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). This is an opportunity for states to commit to a unifying framework on all aspects of international migration, integrating humanitarian and development work, and based on human rights.

A month after the New York Declaration, UN Member States adopted the **New Urban Agenda (NUA)**, at the Habitat III Conference in Quito (Ecuador). For the first time, a UN commitment fully integrates migration in the strategic planning and management of cities and urban systems while affirming the human rights of all inhabitants, regardless of a migrant’s reasons for moving, length of stay or legal status¹. The New Urban Agenda calls upon member states to:

- Support their host cities in the spirit of international cooperation, taking into account national circumstances and recognizing that, although the movement of large populations into towns and cities poses a variety of challenges, it can also bring significant social, economic and cultural contributions to urban life;
- Ensure policy coherence and coordination mechanisms at central, local and regional levels, which is key to local authorities’ engagement in the Global Compact on Migration;
- Support local and regional governments in establishing frameworks that enable the positive contribution of migrants to cities and strengthened urban-rural linkages.

This is a significant **recognition of the role of local governments**², and helps highlight how the role they play in addressing global challenges and in delivering on global commitments has grown considerably. While the competence to determine which non-nationals may enter and stay in their territory is a sovereign prerogative of central governments, the New Urban Agenda highlights how the movement of large populations poses a variety of challenges to towns and cities, and how important it is to support local authorities in establishing frameworks that enable the positive contribution of migrants to cities and strengthened urban-rural linkages.

¹ See Par. 38 of the New Urban Agenda approved in Quito in October 2016.

² See Par. 42.

The challenge of the relationship between central governments and territorial governments is two-fold:

- 1- The quotas for migrant intakes are determined at the State national level, but the demand for and contribution of migrants is local;
- 2- Local governments are responsible for providing services to all their inhabitants, including migrants, but in too many countries, the financial decisions and the legal framework to obtain and allocate resources are still very centralized.

The questions related to multi-level governance often generate tensions between the central governments who decide on migrant intake and the cities that effectively welcome migrants. There is a need for a new framework for inter-institutional dialogue between different spheres of government to facilitate effective decision making in this regard.

Secondly, there is a need for migrants to be included in city decision making as residents but sometimes not yet citizens. Many of the world's cities provide spaces for participation and involvement in local decisions beyond the representation or local elections. Cities often provide wider opportunities for participation where migrants can have their demands heard, as they are closer to the population and more prone to understand the different needs of the people.

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How the Global Conference on Cities and Migration will contribute

The Global Conference on Cities and Migration will be organized by the institutional partners UN-Habitat, IOM and UCLG, in coordination with the hosting partners, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Belgian Federal Government ("host government") and the City of Mechelen ("host city"). The conference will be the starting point to build a new and positive narrative on migration from the perspective of local and regional governments, reflected and embedded in the process of the GCM.

It will serve as a preparatory event for energizing both local governments' contribution to developing a Global Compact on Migration and reviewing the status of the implementation of the migration-related commitments of Habitat III, ahead of the first follow-up during the 9th World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February 2018. In this way, the institutional partners will build on the policy coherence achieved so far, in order to take stock of progress across development agendas as well as inform future intergovernmental agreements of relevance.

Concretely:

1) Global Compact on Migration

As outlined in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Member States have committed to a process of intergovernmental negotiations, facilitated by Mexico and Switzerland, leading to the drafting of a **Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular Migration (GCM)**, to be adopted at an intergovernmental conference to be held in 2018.

While the local authorities Major group is not explicitly invited to the informal consultations, their views can be integrated into the process by either:

- a. Forming part of the national delegation to multilateral processes relevant to migration, as the Sutherland Report recommended³;
- b. As part of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, led by United Cities and Local Governments, which represent the unified voice of more than 500,000 local and regional governments across the world.

It is very important to open channels where the local government constituency can provide a contribution, including concrete actions that they can directly implement as derived from relevant processes for the global compact. The co-facilitators suggested that stakeholders may wish to draw inspiration from the list of possible elements for the global compact, as contained in paragraph 8 of Annex II to the New York Declaration. Inputs received will be made available on the dedicated GCM website.

This Global Conference will benefit from substantive advancements in the preparatory process of the GCM, with essential policy challenges for local authorities gathered during the six thematic meetings.

Further, the Global Conference will take stock of achievements reached by Mayors in international platforms for local authorities and migration. Recommendation 14 (c) of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on International Migration and Development (the Sutherland Report), issued in February 2017, is: *“to enable local leaders to play their part, I call for continued support for the Mayoral Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development as a venue where local leaders can be informed of, and influence, global intergovernmental discussions with a bearing on migration and refugee policy”*. This year’s Mayoral Forum (the 4th) on Human Mobility, Migration and Development, took place in Berlin on 26-27 June, immediately before the Global Forum on Migration and Development co-chaired by the governments of Germany and Morocco. The Mayors of participating cities endorsed a Declaration as input to the preparation process of the GCM. The Global Conference on Cities and Migration in November will build further on this, and the formal thematic, regional and multi stakeholder consultations for the GCM which will have been held in the meantime.

2) Implementation of the New Urban Agenda – 9th World Urban Forum Kuala Lumpur

The focus has now turned on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, which will also help to deliver on SDG 11 and the urban targets of other Sustainable Development Goals.

More work needs to be done on unpacking how the New Urban Agenda can help address specific needs of migrants at local level, to allow them to enjoy the same services and opportunities as local citizens, and maximize the contribution of migrants to sustainable urban development. One key component is the role of local and regional governments in migration governance. A useful first step has been the *“Toolbox for Migration Governance”* that IOM has presented at a side event in Quito. This needs to be piloted and validated in field trials.

The Ninth Session of the World Urban Forum will be the first session to focus on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. WUF9 will be instrumental to substantively feed into the inputs for the first report of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Specific events will need to be proposed to the World Urban Forum Secretariat for inclusion into the Forum, both in terms of a potential special session, side and networking events and potential training sessions.

³ In his recommendation 14 (b), Special Representative of the Secretary-General on International Migration and Development Peter Sutherland urges that *“representatives of local authorities should be systematically included in national delegations at international meetings on migration, including the GFMD, UN High Level Dialogues, and the 2018 intergovernmental migration conference.”*

Expected outcomes to be articulated in the Conference Outcome Document

- Actionable contributions on cooperation for migration governance and local and national levels as input to the stocktaking meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (“Global Compact”), hosted by the Government of Mexico (December 2017);
- Inputs to the follow up and implementation of the New Urban Agenda to be presented at the 9th World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (February 2018), using the Migration Governance Framework and its urban version and the local Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) guidelines, launched in Quito (17 Oct 2016) and Quezon (29 Sept 2016) respectively, as a basis.

Conclusion

Habitat III provided a guiding principle on how to implement sustainable migration policy and management measures which complement and are supported by all governance structures – national, provincial and local governments that have not been involved traditionally in national migration policy processes but now have a clear role in informing policy that is effective and quick responses. However, their role should not be limited to that of informant or alert launcher. Without interfering in the security dimension, local governments should have a voice and be a consultative, proposal and decision-making force within the framework of national migration policies, as many of the decisions taken at national level will have an impact in the services they will have to provide. The dialogue between all levels of government will facilitate the reality check between national strategies and the realities on the ground and have a positive impact to accelerate the process of inclusion of migrants in the cities. Urban cooperation platforms have become more than just opportunities for exchange of best practices across borders, but increasingly aspire to become frameworks for global dialogue on migration and in which local authorities are front of the stage. They will be crucial in informing a Global Compact on Migration that is practical and action-oriented.

Institutional partners

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has an important role to service the full preparatory process leading to the 2018 conference, providing technical and policy expertise, as recognized in paragraph 11 of the New York Declaration.

UN Habitat is a key focal point, within the UN system, on sustainable urbanization and human settlements, including in the implementation, follow-up to and review of the New Urban Agenda, in collaboration with other United Nations system entities with IOM as focal point on migration.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the world organization of local and regional governments and their associations, and represents their interests and their voice on the world stage.

Hosts

Alexander De Croo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation, Digital Agenda, Telecommunications and Postal Services of the Belgian Federal Government

Bart Somers, Mayor of the City of Mechelen, and was awarded the World Mayor Prize in 2016 for providing immigrants in his city with the facilities to contribute to the city’s society, economy and culture.