



Permanent Mission of Belgium to UN

**Side Event to Global Compact on Migration- Thematic Session 4**  
**Migrants' contributions to cities**  
**1.15 – 2.30 pm, 25 July, 2017 – UNHQ New York, CR 5**



In many countries, migration contributes to poverty reduction and enhanced human development by bringing significant social, economic and cultural benefits to cities and local communities. When well-managed, migration spurs economic growth, creates businesses and jobs, fills crucial labour and skills gaps, expands tax bases, contributes to social security schemes and promotes trade, investment and innovation.

Increasing migration to cities does not take place without challenges. Population growth in cities poses a great deal of pressure on infrastructure, the environment and the social fabric of the city. The pace of urbanization can disproportionately affect the capacity of national and local governments of low-income nations to cope. However, the potential

benefits are significant if governments at all levels can harness and promote them to improve the quality of life in their cities.

**Key discussion points:**

- How the contributions of migrants to their host cities, including but not limited to employment, social, and cultural fields, can be better utilized.
- Explore the role of local governments in enhancing the developmental impacts of migration, including policies to promote integration and inclusion for migrants, as part of broader multi-level migration governance frameworks.

**Please RSVP by Friday 21 July to:**

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*The event is part of the preparations for the Global Conference on Cities and Migrants (16-17 November 2017), hosted by the Belgian Federal Government and the City of Mechelen and organized by UN-Habitat, IOM and UCLG. The intent is to develop the city perspective in the follow up to Habitat III and towards the Global Compact on Migration (for more information [ipopp@iom.int](mailto:ipopp@iom.int) and [decorte@un.org](mailto:decorte@un.org) )*



**Concept Note**  
**Side event to Global Compact Thematic Session 4:**  
***Migrants' contributions to cities***  
**1.15 – 2.30 pm, 25 July, 2017 -- New York**

***Well-managed migration benefits cities***

Migration can bring significant social, economic and cultural benefits to migrants and cities. For millions of people, migration can contribute to poverty reduction and enhanced human development. It can offer individuals new opportunities – in areas such as work, education and health– and can enhance the overall well-being and standards of living both of those who move, as well as their families and host communities.

When well-managed, migration can benefit cities, by spurring economic growth, creating businesses and jobs, filling crucial labour and skills gaps, expanding tax bases, contributing to social security schemes and promoting trade, investment and innovation. In major cities such as Sydney, London and New York, migrants represent over a third of the population and, in some cities such as Brussels and Dubai, account for more than half,<sup>1</sup> offering great potential for growth and for economic and social development. Studies on migrants' contributions to New York City for example, have found that migrants are a “driving force” in the city's development, helping to reverse the precarious economic situation of the 1970s and making the city safer, more affordable and more attractive to new residents.<sup>2</sup>

The growth of migration to cities does not take place without challenges. Strong population growth in cities poses a great deal of pressure on infrastructure, the environment and the social fabric of the city. The pace of urbanization and the capacity of national and local governments among low-income nations to cope with its consequences can often be cause for concern. However, the potential opportunities are significant, and all levels of government have a clear interest in promoting these benefits in order to enhance the success and vitality of their societies.

***The benefits of migration can be undermined by poor policy***

Despite the potential for migration to have positive impacts however, the potential gains of migration can be undermined by decisions and policy responses that are often short-sighted, ineffective, and in many cases at cross-purposes with the objective of promoting migration for the benefit of all. Instead of enhancing the benefits of migration, poorly designed and inconsistent policy measures in fact prevent migrants and states from reaping the full gains that migration can bring.

For example, migrants are too often forced to work below their actual qualification levels due to a lack of cross-border recognition of skills and certifications. Others are prevented from working at all because of restrictive visa conditions, or have limited access to basic social services and legal advice, undermining their effective integration and well-being. Such barriers not only blunt migrants' personal ambitions, but

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<sup>1</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2015, *World Migration Report: migrants and cities: new partnerships to manage mobility*, Geneva.

<sup>2</sup> Americas Society, 2014, *Immigration and New York City: The Contributions of Foreign- Born Americans to New York's Renaissance, 1975–2013*, New York.

also rob countries and communities of valuable potential human capital. By some estimates, the losses resulting from poor migration policies are in the trillions of dollars globally.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Effective integration in cities is crucial to success***

Effective integration is critical to ensuring the full benefits of migration are realized. Although migration policies on entry and stay are generally determined and implemented at the national level, demand for and response to migrants is a greater reality at the city level. Many cities have become wise to the challenges and opportunities presented by migration, and now play an important role in promoting migrants' integration, incorporating migration issues into urban planning and development initiatives. . Many municipalities, however, remain uninvolved in migration policy processes, have resource and capacity limitations, and insufficient contact with institutions that would support them with the required expertise.

The lessons this provides for policy makers are two-fold:

- First, in order to promote the positive contribution of migrants to sustainable development, migrants must be empowered and enabled through access to employment opportunities and to basic social services. Migrants whose rights are protected and who are effectively integrated contribute more to the development both of their countries of origin and destination. Government policies are critical to this, and must avoid creating perverse outcomes that undermine, rather than further, the goal of well-managed migration.
- Second, as the places where migrant integration takes place, cities play a critical role. Local authorities and other actors must recognize and be able to harness and maximize the skills, productivity, and experience migrants bring to their host communities. These local efforts should be fully connected to national-level policy and decision-making on migration issues.

### ***Global Compact on Migration and the New Urban Agenda: opportunities and commitments***

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, it 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 status. 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

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Clemens, 2011, "Economics and Emigration: Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk?", CGD Working Paper 264, Washington, D.C. Available from [www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1425376](http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1425376).

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 authorities in establishing frameworks that enable the positive contribution of migrants to cities and strengthened urban–rural linkages

***Global Conference on Cities and Migrants (Mechelen/Belgium, 16-17 November 2017): galvanizing the voice of local authorities***

UN-Habitat, IOM and UCLG are organizing a Global Conference on Cities and Migration, hosted by the Belgian Federal Government and the City of Mechelen. It will serve as a preparatory event for both galvanising 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 9<sup>th</sup> 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. This side event is seen as an important stepping stone to feed into the Conference.

**Key discussion points:**

- Discuss the contributions of migrants to their host cities, including but not limited to employment, social, and cultural fields.
- Explore the role of local governments in enhancing the developmental impacts of migration, including policies to promote integration and inclusion for migrants, as part of broader multi-level migration governance frameworks.

**Sponsoring Mission:** Belgium  
**Co-organizers:** International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN Habitat  
**Date and time** 25 July, 1315 - 1430  
**Location:** UN Conference Room 5, New York