Migration and reception in Mediterranean cities –

Experiences, challenges and future actions for municipalities

Final report on workshop held on 27 and 28 July 2021

MigrationWork CIC, 7 September 2021

Contents

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Municipality of Sousse, Tunisia
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I The regional migration context and the role of municipalities

The local perspective on migrant[1] reception

Migrant reception refers to services that are essential for newcomers in the phase immediately after their arrival. They offer orientation in the new society, practical as well as legal advice, and support in consolidating one's status and accessing the most fundamental services:education, health care, housing, employment. Reception services have a shorter time-frame than wider integration policies or policies for fostering intercultural relations and interaction.,This does not mean that they neglect the long-term inclusion of migrants, for which these first steps are crucial.

Cities have a key role to play on migrant reception, and often act in this area from a specific position:
➔ **Migration is intrinsically linked to cities** as a main driver of city growth, both economically and demographically.
➔ People belong to the city by living there (**residence-based citizenship**). This is reflected in some contexts by the law (e.g. concept of "fellow citizenship" in Article 13 of Turkish Municipal Law; Spanish status as "neighbours").
➔ Even when there is not such legislation, mayors follow the idea of residence-based citizenship or belonging by thinking about policies for migrants not based on their status or the rights they might have, but based on their needs.
➔ This attitude that is sometimes referred to as "l**ocal pragmatism**" is also a consequence of the insight that excluding people from access to basic services such as health, education or housing jeopardises social cohesion and public health of the city as a whole.

The role of cities in migrant reception and integration has gained further recognition, both in research and by governments and international organisations. This has led to slogans such as "integration happens primarily at the local level". But cities develop their reception policies often **without formal competences and without support from national governments**.

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[1] In this report, in line with UN practice, we use the term 'migrant' to refer to anyone who moves from the state of which they are a national to reside in another country for a year or more, referring equally to refugees, economic migrants and others who change their country of usual residence.

Pillars and key services in local reception

Political Leadership	• on recognising migrants, providing services and fostering integration • everything follows from this
Coordination	• internal (across city departments) • external with economic actors, unions, NGO,...
Coalitions and dialogue	• coalitions with other cities • dialogue with national government and international organisations
Communication	• direct communication with citizenry • working with media
Access to services	• mainstream where possible • targeted or bridge-building where necessary

Figure: Pillars of local reception policies

Political leadership in recognising migrants and the need to provide services to them is the central starting point for all local initiative in migrant reception. Following from this leadership, on a technical side, coordination within the city and with partners outside the city council is needed to develop shared goals and to agree on how to reach these goals together – a strategic approach to reception and integration.

☐ Practical example: Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau: expressed Barcelona's capacity to become a **city of refuge and a reception point** offering refugees initial attention. "We want people arriving in the city to live like any other resident. In 2015, the city set up a "city of refuge" strategy with a dedicated coordinator, leading to, for instance, an increase of capacity of the city's first reception service SAIER and the city's own accommodation programme for refugees.

In addition to local coordination, many cities are active in **building coalitions with other cities** to exchange and team up to jointly engage in a dialogue with national governments.

☐ Practical example: In the aftermath of the refugee reception crisis, the city network Eurocities has been very active in lobbying the European Commission for direct access to integration funding for cities. This message was constantly reiterated both at technical and political meetings with the European Commission and eventually led to a more city-friendly regulation for the new Asylum and Migration Fund starting in 2021.

International organisations are also an important partner for cities, and have started to increasingly recognise cities as interlocutors to gain first-hand information on the ground and fund pilot initiatives.

Direct **communication** on migration with the citizenry, and work with media on how to communicate on migration in a non-biased way is essential as a proactive approach to fight rumours and stereotypes and to not let others exploit migration for political purposes.

☐ Practical example: The city of Nador, Morocco conducted training with 20 journalists to combat negative stereotypes in reporting about migration in accordance with journalistic ethics (MC2CM project).

Finally, access to services is the substance of migrant recognition. Whenever possible, most cities today aim to serve migrants through *mainstream* services which target the whole population. To make sure migrants are aware of these services, bridging devices such as interpretation or multilingual information may sometimes be needed. When migrants have very specific needs, or face barriers that cannot be

overcome with these instruments, *targeted* services are used, e.g. introduction programmes; schemes to teach the host-country language; or assistance in getting the recognition of foreign qualifications.

What are key services in reception?

Most cities have a **service for orientation and advice** in place as a first entry point to orient and refer migrants. Such services can consist of physical "one-stop-shops", electronic or printed information or of outreach workers providing information in places where migrants live or work. Regardless of the competences they have, providing first orientation to help newcomers is an effective measure for city councils, as it helps newcomers in navigating the receiving society and in accessing more specialised support by the city council, civil society organisations or other levels of government. One-stop-shops providing different services under one roof are first and foremost an effective way to support migrants, but they can also be an expression of effective coordination across municipal departments, with civil society and other levels of government (see the example of SAIER, Barcelona, in Section II).

Formal and informal **language learning opportunities** are another key local service directed to migrants. Being able to express oneself in the host society's official language/s is one of the most important, if not the single most important step in the integration process. It is a pre-condition for full participation and positively influences opportunities in work, education and social interaction. CIty councils might not have a track-record in supporting language learning, but they are centrally placed to mobilise adult education and schools, employers and trade unions, cultural and other associations to help newcomers in learning the language. Creating an offer that is flexible in space and time, takes into account different learning types and that blends with other areas of life (e.g. work, school, child care, cultural activities) are some of the approaches that have proven successful for local authorities.

Four "classic" mainstream services are crucial in helping migrants to move towards social inclusion upon arrival: **health care, education, housing and employment.** It is important that cities support access to these services not only because they are key for social mobility, but also because they can help in securing an official residency status (employment) or vice versa, are restricted by state policies to people holding an official residency status. While in emergency situations measures targeting particularly vulnerable newcomers are often necessary (e.g. emergency housing solutions, segregated schools in refugee camps, etc.), in the long run it is often more effective to ensure that services for the whole population are also accessible for newcomers. This has two sides: on the one hand, ensuring that migrants have a right to access healthcare, schools, childcare and employment services; and on the other, ensuring that service providers understand the specific needs of this target group and have the means to meet them (e.g. through interpretation services).

Overcoming tensions between newcomers and the **local police** is another key area. Newcomers with insecure legal or economic status are inevitably vulnerable. If they dare not seek help from the police for fear of deportation, they may fall victim to exploitation and crime (e.g. sexual exploitation, domestic violence). Measures under the patronage of the municipality for establishing trust between the local police and migrants can include, for instance, training for police to better understand the situations and rights of migrants, but also prevention work for migrants provided by the police.

From the city migration profiles to solution implementation – takeaways of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration program (ICMPD)

The Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project MC2CM (funded by the EU and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) aims to create more inclusive cities through dialogue, improving city's knowledge base on migration and by providing expertise and training.

One of the project's actions is to provide grants (the "City Actions" program)) for reception and intergration services in Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian and Tunisian cities. Funded projects include the project ACMALS for strengthening cooperation between civil society and municipality in Sfax and Tangier Accueil, let by MedCities in partnership with Tangier municipality, aimed to set up a service for orientation and advice in Tangier.

ICMPD's key learning points from these city pilot projects are:
➜ the importance of working with civil society, in particular in the first phase of establishing reception policies
➜ the need to improve the capacities of municipalities by providing training and hiring new staff
➜ the need to establish migration and migrant inclusion as a new key axis in city policies.

Cities' profiles: diverse situations and common needs

The profiles of MedCities members attending the meeting reflected quantitatively and qualitatively different kinds of migrant movement and settlement. Firstly, **profiles of migrant populations within cities show huge diversity**, between (for instance):

➜ migrants living in urban spaces, in camps run by international organisations or in complete informality and destitution (e.g. in the woods surrounding Moroccan transit cities)
➜ recognised refugees, contrasted with people without legal status
➜ different demographics and degrees of vulnerability (e.g. high number of women/children in Sfax)

Secondly, cities also host **migrant populations of varying absolute and relative sizes,** from small groups to huge proportions of population such as one-fifth of regional population (for Greater Irbid, Jordan) that require the adaptation of core urban infrastructure and services like waste management and water supply.
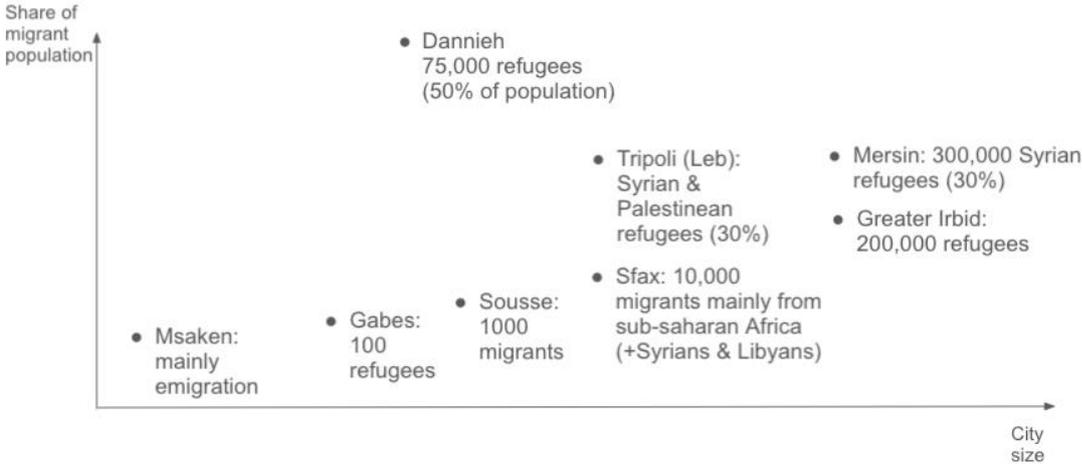
Figure: Schematic overview on migrant populations and their share in the city population based on input provided in the pre-meeting survey with MedCities members

Key challenges that cities identified in meeting the needs of their migrant residents include, according to the online survey prior to the meeting:
➜ a lack of information of local authorities about migrants
➜ meeting language learning needs
➜ labour market integration
➜ problems of living together between established residents & newcomers

Workshop discussion pointed to further areas of urgent need (see also below) at the institutional level:

➜ steps to promote **multi-level governance** of migrant reception and integration, creating partnerships between cities, national government and international agencies
➜ building cities' **capacity to bid for available international funding**: that is, ensuring that they have adequate staff and structures to make bids and manage grant-funded projects.

Prof Boubakri stressed the additional challenge of developing policies for migrant populations which show a lot of *fluctuation*, as many migrants seek to move on e.g. to Europe. This **high "turnover" of migrant population** seems to be a challenge for many cities, as migrants seem to spend less and less time on average in the same locality. This could imply that they need support which is on a smaller scale but more readily accessible than services for migrants who seek long-term settlement. However, planning for migrants in a long-term perspective is still crucial for many migrants and local reception policies.

The governance-related challenges that were identified include
➜ lack of legal framework and resources
➜ coordination with national government
➜ coordination with civil society

As much as a lack of clear competences can block local action, the discussions and the examples of the Tunisian cities and Irbid in Jordan (see case study below) showed that holding **formal competences on migration or integration are not a pre-condition for local action**. MW experts stressed that local authorities in Europe - and world-wide - have almost always started work on migration without any formal competences in the area (in the sense of explicit legal powers to act). National governments everywhere begin by insisting that they alone can intervene on migration issues, or do not act at all. Therefore, seeing the urgent need locally to work on these issues, cities have begun practical work on migrant reception and integration by using ordinary powers already assigned to them to provide services and promote citizens' well-being: for example, as in Irbid, their general competences in housing, public health and community safety, education, cultural activity, and economic development. This does, however, not imply that local authorities should not strive for cooperation with the national level, or to demand for national funding for local action.

While participants agreed on the importance of coordination with civil society, relations with these organisations seem to vary between highly cooperative ones (Sfax) and more competitive ones (Sousse), when some generalist CSO are establishing reception work independently from the municipality.

II Focus on three challenges and how they have been addressed in Mediterranean cities

Challenge 1 - Partnerships with local actors - necessary alliances

Coordination with civil society organisations is essential for municipalities as it promises a better understanding of the city's migrants and a stronger legitimacy of the city's reception policies. A strategy setting out goals, roles and actions, a timetable and resources can be a good way of cooperating with civil society organization.

Xavier Cubells, Director Immigration and Refuge Service, Municipality of Barcelona presented the city's approach to working with civil society in running the one-stop-shop SAIER. The service is available to all migrants regardless of their status (In the first semester of 2021, in fact, only 26,5% of users had a regular status). In SAIER, users are referred from a general entry desk to specialised services within SAIER and other services within the municipality. The former include services for legal advice (e.g. advice on residence status), language learning support and employment, most of which are run by civil society organisations which work on behalf of the city.
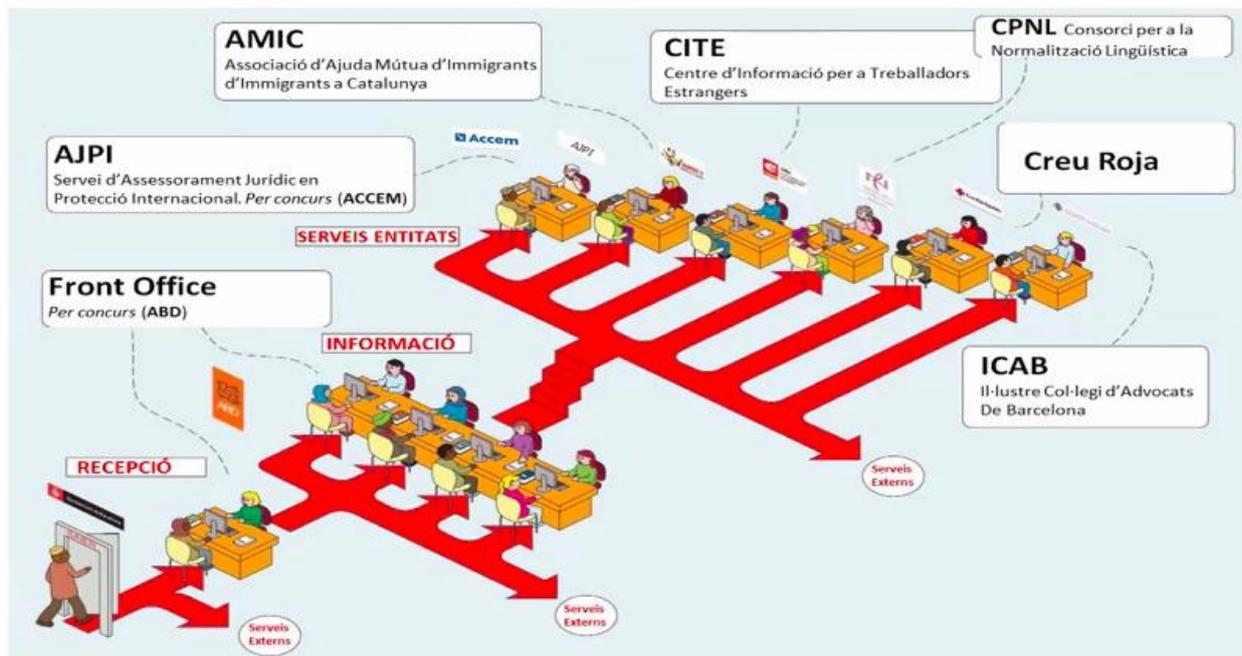
Data sharing between partners and the protection of sensitive personal data when working in partnership was identified as a key issue for coordination, in particular with view to national government. International organisations such as UNHCR can act as grantor and data storage point to ensure that data is effectively "firewalled" against national government when necessary.

Challenge 2 - Collecting data for more informed decision-making

The importance of collecting data as a starting point to acknowledge the presence of migrants and their needs was at the heart of the second challenge. It focused on a study conducted by Prof. Hassen Boubakri, migration expert, on the migration challenges and policy responses in Tunisia. This work with

six Tunisian cities showed that the COVID-19 emergency has brought better recognition of migration as a policy challenge in Tunisia.

At national level the pandemic persuaded the Minister of Interior to recognise that migrants, regardless of status, should be given access to health care during the emergency. At local level, the pandemic has made it vital for municipalities to collect data on the presence and needs of migrants, which has triggered the development of local services for them, demonstrated local capacity and increased the recognition of local authorities as actors in migrant reception. Migrants themselves, in the pandemic context, show greater confidence in seeking help from municipal services.

Cities are gaining *legitimacy* as actors on migration issues, Prof. Boubakri argued, despite the lack of formal competences. Better recognition of cities' role has in turn fostered new cooperation with international organisations

City participants in the workshop illustrated this more active and ambitious role for Mediterranean cities in gathering data on migrant populations. In Sousse (Tunisia) for example, an urban observatory has not only made a 'census' (recensement) of local migrant population – including information on their economic activity - but has also surveyed their needs.

The city's experience highlighted key questions about confidentiality of data, discussed by the workshop: who collects this information; who stores it; how it is shared; what purpose it is used for; and how to create trust between migrants who originally provide it and agencies who may use it. These issues could be very sensitive for migrant communities, who may fear the use of data about them for purposes of control or exclusion. The confidentiality issue had arisen for Sousse, for instance, when a major international agency asked for data on migrants in 'vulnerable' categories.

In Jordan, Greater Irbid Municipality with its very large number of refugees (one-fifth of current population of 1 million, mostly Syrian) had also set up an urban observatory on migration. In the context of its strategic plan for local development to 2023, Irbid had given priority to mapping its migrant population across the city-region, using a geolocalised system. Data from the mapping were used to target assistance to these refugee communities.
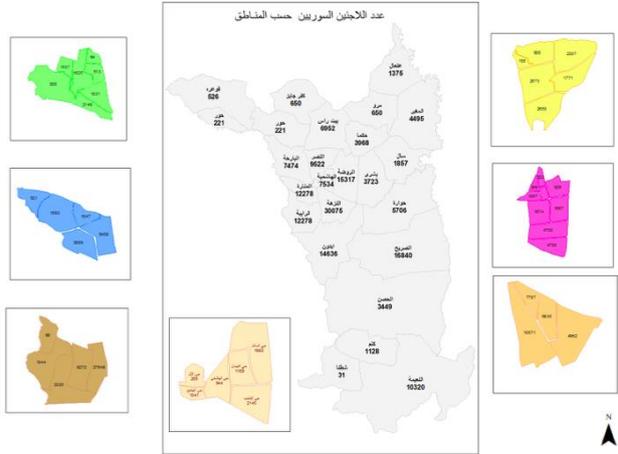
Challenge 3 - Working with migrants and other citizens to tackle integration and coexistence.

The workshop reflected the current trend towards developing reception policies together with migrants as 'experts by experience', and in collaboration with other cities. . This approach has potential not only to create policies that better meet the needs of migrants, but also to strengthen their voice in civic life and to dispel stereotypes dividing them from the host society.

The case of Greater Irbid Municipality (Jordan), presented by Leila Youssef, illustrated local leadership in recognising the potentially positive role of its large population of migrants in local development. Here,

as in Tunisian cities, local mapping of refugees had provided a starting point for acknowledging local needs. The Irbid case also illustrated the point made in this workshop (above), that cities can become active in migrant reception or integration without waiting for a formal transfer of legal competences from national level.

Recent steps in Jordan towards decentralisation (laws on municipalities and on development and organisation of cities and villages) gave Irbid scope to work on this issue, although there is no explicit recognition of migration or reception as a municipal competence. New legal provision for housing had given an opportunity to engage refugees. Irbid has applied another law, licensing self-employment at home, to open up new possibilities for refugees to generate their own income, regularising their work and increasing their economic contribution e.g. in the agricultural or food sector.

III MedCities members' support needs and future work of the network

Main support needs raised during the meeting

Discussions already during the first session stressed the need for **increasing capacity** in the local administration. As was reported from Sousse, municipalities often lack the capacities to develop proposals for international donors or to run such projects. In Tunisia, this is related to the implementation of decentralisation taking a long time, and leaving local administration in a limbo where they have to confront new challenges without having the means to do so.

➔ If this challenge is widely shared, it marks a clear case for MedCities to build capacity among its members in the development and management of externally funded projects and/or to engage as a coordinator in the development and implementation of such projects.

Prof Boubakri raised the question on how to **take into account different policy development stages** between cities in future transnational learning on migration, i.e. how to meaningfully bring together cities with different trajectories and experiences.

➔ If MedCities members see such disparities as an obstacle, the network could decide to focus on learning tools (such as mentoring) which incorporate them in the relationship between different cities in learning processes. At the same time, more complex learning tools such as the one's described in the next section are flexible enough to take into account different contexts and cities being at different stages of policy development and still produce learning for all participants..

Potential themes

The discussions during the workshop and replies to the online-survey identified the **following themes to deepen MedCities' beginning work on migration**:
1. **local coordination of reception policies and services:** e.g. coordination within the municipality and with external partners to develop a joint local approach to migrant and refugee reception and key services for first reception
2. **creating economic opportunities for migrants**, e.g. training, removing obstacles for income-generating activities, cooperation with employers and trade unions

3. **data collection on and with migrants, including participative census and needs analysis**. This could build on the work done in Tunisian cities (see Challenge 2, above) and stress the importance of information gathering as the first step to planning reception policies and in gaining recognition for the phenomenon of migration and the role of municipalities to manage it.

Methods for transnational work and mutual learning

There are different methods that are used to structure transnational exchanges and mutual learning processes such as the one envisaged on migration in MedCities. In the table below, we have listed the most common methods and tried to classify them, based on our experience, according to the duration of engagement they imply (short to long term), the resources they need (low to high) and their potential impact on triggering local change (low to high). Of course, these methods can also be combined to fit best the needs of the individual cities (e.g. developing a benchmark of common standards between cities and then using this benchmark to assess city policies).

Tool	Duration of engagement	Resources needed	Local impact
Single learning events focusing on specific topics: seminar, workshop, conference deepening certain topics that were touched upon in the initial workshop	short	low	low
Collection and exchange of **good practice** from cities	short	low	low
Staff exchanges between two or more cities to understand how the other cities work and to learn from this insight	short	medium	medium
Mentoring: more experienced cities team up with less experienced cities to provide personalised support through mutual city visits and online-cooperation	medium	medium	high
Benchmarking: cities define common standards for their reception policies	medium	medium	medium
Action Planning: cities supporting each other in conducting needs analysis and developing an action plan or a strategy	long	high	high
Peer reviews: practitioners from other cities visit a host city to assess each other's policies, identifying gaps and good practice, often in relation to a common standard (see benchmark, above)	long	high	high
Working groups and communities of practice: a group of city practitioners works together in the long term and meets regularly to develop mutual trust and discuss technical challenges to jointly find solutions for problems (note that the option of working groups within MedCities was also mentioned by MedCities Secretary General during the meeting).	long	variable (depending on intensity of collabo-ration)	high