



Global Parliament of Mayors Summit Position Paper

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## **Cities, Urban Areas, and Climate Migration**

**21 October 2021**

On October 21-23, mayors from around the world, convened by the Global Parliament of Mayors, will gather virtually in Palermo to chart a path forward for leadership in the post-COVID era. They will be joined by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities, think tanks, industry, and other stakeholders. Participating mayors will debate critical policy points, share experiences and lessons, and identify key policy actions around five themes: Culture; Urban Pandemic Response; Global Governance; Cities, Urban Areas, and Climate Migration; and, Rethinking Urban Economies After COVID-19. This paper provides a policy brief and potential policy actions for the Cities, Urban Areas, and Climate Migration theme.<sup>1</sup>

### **Overview**

In a warming, urbanizing world, cities are the main sanctuaries for the growing number of people affected by climate and environmental change. Cities, as hosts to many migrants, have a mandate and a responsibility to provide for the needs of their residents, including migrants, and to support newcomers' long-run integration. At the same time, by adapting their infrastructures and institutions to growing service demands, cities can benefit from the cultural diversity, economic prosperity, and social dynamism that newcomers offer. As cities play an increasingly central role in addressing the environmental crisis and in welcoming the growing number of migrants, national leaders and the international community must enable cities to seek solutions that deliver on this responsibility. We urge governments and international organizations to recognize that migration is increasingly an urban phenomenon, notably, by empowering cities to plan for manageable migration and relocation of those at risk due to climate disasters.

### **Policy Brief**

Migration induced by conflict or disaster is neither recent nor fixed. The number of displaced persons has substantially grown in the past three decades with 82.4 million people, or more than 1% of the world population, forcibly displaced by 2021. In the face of these unprecedented circumstances, many governments have increased border enforcement, encampment, and criminalization of migrant populations. Although population displacement is often the result of a multicausal relationship between environmental,

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political, economic, and sociocultural drivers, the climate crisis has proven to be an ever more pressing factor. Storms, floods, wildfires, droughts, and other extreme weather events forced 55 million people out of their homes in 2020.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of global leadership and locally identified protection programs, some cities and nations are facing complete destruction, with developing countries and vulnerable communities being hardest hit by the environmental crises. Many of our cities are in the most affected regions, such as coastal and dry areas of Africa, coasts of Mexico and the Caribbean, river systems of Asia and low-lying islands in the Indian and Pacific oceans, regions collectively home to hundreds of millions and are already experiencing extreme weather conditions. As a result, movements within, to, and from urban areas are producing a demographic dynamic with implications for all facets of urban planning and governance. As we move forward, we must recognize that the climate will continue to change even as the international community commits to reduce emissions and use renewable energy on a greater scale. As such, we must build resilience and advocate for inclusive adaptation programs by linking local knowledge and global resources through locally situated leaders.

Thanks to the advocacy of the IOM, MMC, C40, and the GPM, it is now widely recognized that people at risk of climate disasters will find their way to and through cities. The Mayoral Roundtable on Migration is now included in the official forum where international migration policies are debated and discussed. As a result of the ongoing efforts of local leaders, at an official side event of the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (UN HLPF 2021) held in July 2021, mayors from around the world came together with representatives of national governments and UN officials to discuss the pressing challenges related to these population movements in the context of environmental change. The discussion also focused on the interrelated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). However, there is significant progress yet to be made to elevate local voices and enable local actions.

### **Recommended Local, National, and International Policy Actions**

As we work together to address the climate emergency and its impacts on human mobility, the role of local leaders in responding to the challenge must be harnessed and supported. This includes seeking out and integrating their local knowledge, expertise, and needs into national policy actions, and providing the tools and resources cities need to allocate direct services to migrants in their community, regardless of legal status. The GPM is well equipped to give a unified voice to this cause, and more significantly, to coordinate, organize and scale up the collective action of mayors and local leaders. Our [call to action](#), which targets the international community, national governments, local leaders and communities, proposes five interrelated ways forward:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/>



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- **The international community and governments at all levels** must act upon the climate crisis itself, particularly in climate “hotspots” to prevent further forced migration, while simultaneously allocating resources for local leaders to provide more sustainable and resilient infrastructure and build a culture of hospitality in their cities.
- **Climate migration should be addressed as an urban phenomenon**, allowing access to funds and grants assigned for climate action and disaster risk management. Migration-related resilience and adaptation projects must be financed at the urban level and investments should be made available for urban solutions and inclusive development. In addition, the international community should extend its technical support and assistance for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCSA) in climate risk areas as well as to migrants’ destination cities.
- **Mayors and local leaders are well equipped** to address local challenges and obstacles associated with climate migration and to push forward a community-centered approach. To that end, they must develop plans for adaptation and resilience by involving local knowledge resources and working with indigenous communities, while at the same time engaging in environmental and demographic evidence-based urban planning and local data collection. Those plans should also incorporate and address human mobility dimensions.
- **Mayors and local leaders must raise awareness** among local host communities regarding the value of cultural heritage, social assets, and economic prosperity that newcomers offer. Using participatory planning and budgeting, involving neighborhood level leaders, and creating spaces for neighborly interactions can help reduce undesirable tension between the host communities and the migrants.
- **Local leaders must help strengthen sustainable regional economies**, while reducing the impacts of climate migration on urban infrastructure. Such local economic efforts should define climate migration within broader migration considerations and should be based on a development coalition between the local authorities, the market, and the commons.