

Equal Partnerships Policy Paper **2024**

Creating Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Address Urban Migration and Displacement in African Intermediary Cities

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- Multi-stakeholder partnerships are key for African intermediary cities as they transform into urban hubs of migration and displacement.
- National governments and international organisations need to consider local governments as partners and include them in programming and policy planning.
- Local governments should establish municipal focal points on migration and displacement even if their municipality engages only indirectly on these topics.
- Local research institutes should partner with local governments, migrant/refugee associations and NGOs to enable young professionals to gain practical experience on urban migration governance.

Africa is witnessing an ongoing transformation from rural to increasingly plural urban societies. While this transformation is well documented, the focus of scholarship and policymakers has been predominantly on human mobility towards and into major urban areas and capital cities. In contrast, intermediary cities, the in-between the rural and the metropolitan, have been largely absent in academic and policy debates.ⁱ

Addressing this gap becomes all the more important, as more and more migrants, refugees and IDPs settle, either temporarily or permanently, in African intermediary cities. These cities constitute central spaces for mixed movements driven by processes of urbanization, socio-economic transformation, environmental stressors, as well as conflict and persecution.ⁱⁱ Though not always intended as final destinations, persons on the move may consider intermediary cities more accessible – financially, geographically and socially – than capital cities.

African local governments are therefore increasingly confronted with core issues of migration and displacement, and are directly impacted by respective (inter)national policies and (the absence of) funding flows. Nevertheless, national policymakers, international organizations and donors rarely consider local governments as relevant partners to address mixed migration.

This lack of partnerships results from a vicious cycle: National and international partners consider that local governments lack official mandates, resources and capacities to serve as partners in the governance of migration and displacement. However, the lack of cooperation reproduces such realities and deepens cooperation rifts. These lead to cooperation failure which is all the more problematic given that human mobility plays an important role for African intermediary cities' physical, social and economic urban planningⁱⁱⁱ – despite limited municipal mandates and resources. Participatory research conducted by the Equal Partnerships project shows that network approaches can be essential instruments to

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What is an intermediary city?

There are many definitions that vary between 50,000 and 1 million inhabitants. But population is not everything. The cities we speak about are intermediary in the sense that they link capital cities with smaller towns and rural areas through flows of goods, ideas, funds and people. At the same time, these cities are secondary regarding economic status, municipal capacities and resources, as national development strategies and (inter)national investment have for a long time prioritized capital cities.

In this policy paper, we refer to intermediary cities when speaking about these specific urban spaces with their multitude of actors. When referring to the political entity responsible for governing and administering an intermediary city we speak of local governments.

break this vicious cycle: While national and international stakeholders can bring funding, networks and capacity building to the table, local governments, NGOs, private sector actors and research institutes can complement these assets with on-the-ground knowledge and access to migrant and refugee communities.

In line with this approach, the Equal Partnerships project works with African intermediary cities to explore opportunities for collaborative, urban

migration governance. Through participatory research, workshops and networking formats, we bring together local, national and international actors to develop practical ideas and policy recommendations for multi-stakeholder partnerships addressing migration and displacement in African intermediary cities. This policy brief summarizes key partnership recommendations for local and national governments, civil society, migrant and refugee associations, research institutes, international organizations, donors and private sector actors.

How to Ground Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Joint Visions?

In their everyday work, local, national and international actors addressing urban migration and displacement tend to use diverging definitions of target groups, work along disparate (project-based) timelines and have unequal access to resources. These discrepancies challenge the creation of sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships. In order to move beyond ad-hoc cooperation, partnerships need to be based on joint - and context-specific - visions of what urban migration governance means in a city. But how to create such joint visions?

Build Trust Among Stakeholders

Local governments need to build relationships of trust with urban civil society actors, national governments and international organizations. The examples of Sfax (Tunisia) and Oujda (Morocco) show that local NGOs and migrant/refugee associations can be important cooperation partners for local governments.^{iv}

However, such relationships only work in the medium to long term if they are based on trust and built to “survive” political election cycles. Local governments, NGOs, migrant/refugee associations and local universities could sign long-term agreements (MoUs) focusing on practical cooperation such as sharing complementary resources including physical spaces for activities, first-hand knowledge of migrants’ and refugees’ needs and potentials, training capacities, information on calls for proposals and



funding opportunities. Similarly, local governments need trust-based dialogue channels with national governments and international organizations that go beyond (project-based) ad-hoc cooperation whenever human mobility peaks or crisis situations occur. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UN Habitat and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) should establish permanent communication channels with local governments and offer to facilitate local-national dialogues with African governments interested in strengthening national governance of migration and displacement through context-sensitive, local solutions.

Create City Focal Points and Ensure Institutional Learning

In all six cities, civil society actors and city representatives highlighted potential benefits of creating focal points on migration and displacement in the local administration. The idea being that even if a local administration's main focus is not on migration per se, but on a related topic such as economic development, housing, or education, it would be helpful to designate a person tasked with gathering relevant information of institutional activities and ensuring that migration/displacement issues are considered in all institutional strategies. City focal points could thus represent a compromise between seizing opportunities of informal cooperation between the municipality and other actors on the one hand and clarifying migration-related responsibilities of municipal actors on the other hand. Creating such focal points would also make it easier for civil society actors and international organizations to obtain relevant information and include local administrations in dialogues, trainings and planning activities.

Establishing official city positions could furthermore improve institutional learning. In the current situation, know-how on activities and networks is often linked to individual city representatives engaging on migration/displacement issues on top of other responsibilities. When these representatives leave the city or switch from one department to another, this knowledge is frequently lost. City focal points, however, could dedicate part of their work to

documenting cooperation structures and passing operational knowledge and contact details of city partners on to new colleagues.

This leads us to the question of funding. As many local governments suffer from scarce human resources, national governments should support interested cities in establishing such positions. National governments could be incentivized to do so via co-funding from the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). Creating a dedicated program to support city focal points would contribute to making the GCM's whole-of-government approach a reality.

Place Migrant and Refugee Perspectives at the Centre of Planning Processes

In many of the studied cities, migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees struggle to participate in planning activities and decision-making processes due to cultural and language barriers, marginalization, gender discrimination or questions of legal status. In particular, migrants in irregular situations as well as urban refugees officially required to live in refugee camps face significant challenges in establishing associations, joining existing migrant/refugee associations, or gaining access to coordination structures where public authorities are involved. A representative from a migrant association reported, for instance, that their efforts to support migrants in irregular situations in their integration had been discouraged by the authorities, stating that they would cut their support if contacts with irregular migrants were established.

However, experience from civil society and international actors, such as MS.2 and Pionniers du Changement in Oujda (Morocco) as well as IOM and Terre d'Asile in Sfax (Tunisia), shows that the direct cooperation with migrants and refugees – irrespective of their legal status – can strengthen the impact of these organizations on the ground.[▼]

Such cooperation takes the form of hiring migrants and refugees as local staff, organizing community outreach and holding multilingual

How to coordinate local-international planning?

The Council of the Oriental Region in Oujda, the Wilaya and the Moroccan Government have established a coordination structure to bring together three development agencies (CAAD, Enabel, Expertise France) and IOM to ensure the alignment of international engagement with local strategies on migration and development and to strengthen the complementarity between the different international projects.

coordination meetings. Local and regional governments should learn from these approaches, appoint focal points responsible for outreach to migrant and refugee communities, hold consultation and coordination meetings with adequate translation, create migrant/refugee advisory bodies for the city council and hire staff with lived migration/displacement experience to work on issues such as social cohesion, basic services (in particular in the area of health care) and urban planning.

Build International Planning Around Local Perspectives and Rethink Evaluation

Over the last decade, we can observe a “local turn” among international organizations and development agencies, resulting in a growing number of projects supporting local governments. However, local governments are mostly invited to join projects or respond to calls for projects once the planning phase is largely over. As a result, international actors miss opportunities to strengthen the outcome-orientation of their work through context-sensitive local knowledge. Several local stakeholders participating in the Equal Partnerships workshops highlighted that they feel at times like they are forced to re-invent the wheel by going through the same projects over and over again. To avoid this risk, international organizations and development agencies should reserve part of their budgets for consultations with local governments, civil society and migrant/refugee associations prior to program development. Ideally, several international actors would organize such

consultations together to avoid overstressing local capacities and build a base for complementary engagement.

From the perspective of local governments and civil society, international actors should furthermore rethink their evaluation strategies. The aim here should be to focus less on the number of persons consulted/reached/served within a specific project period, but rather on convincing donors that a responsible use of funds demands setting budget aside to evaluate medium-term impacts on entire communities or city areas. Such evaluation strategies would advance principles central to both area-based approaches as well as the Global Compact for Migration.

How to Make Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships last?

So far, multi-stakeholder coordination on urban migration and displacement in African intermediary cities remains frequently ad-hoc and short-term, depending on individual engagement and shifting availability of project-based funding. But what makes partnerships thrive in the medium to long term?

Build on Existing Coordination Structures

Cities with pre-existing coordination structures bringing together actors from different governance levels such as the County Steering Group in Garissa (Kenya) could benefit from introducing migration and displacement issues into ongoing coordination activities. Building on established structures will reduce the strain on resources and connect the engagement of local authorities on migration and displacement with core city mandates.^{vi}

In cities where public and civil society actors have built separate coordination structures addressing migration/displacement, these stakeholders should consider creating a joint space for exchange, while respecting the need for operational firewalls. An emerging good practice is the Oujda Migration Network, bringing together NGOs with local/regional government actors and national agencies.^{vii}

Professionalize Action

Multi-stakeholder partnerships gain in sustainability when carried by actors with the necessary administrative, legal and technical capacities, skills and knowledge. However, on-the-job training opportunities are scarce and university programs do not necessarily prepare students for on-the-ground work. To broaden the pool of professionals with practical experience in migration governance and related fields, local universities could establish partnerships with local governments and NGOs to create degree programs that include guest lectures and internship with NGOs and city departments. Students, the local governments and NGOs could benefit significantly if students would spend a semester gaining practical experience in the field as part of their studies. Such cooperation could also become a starting point for developing short-term training courses by and for civil society, the local administrations and the city councils.

Improve Local Access to (Inter)national Financing and Funding

Inclusive local action on migration and displacement needs financial resources. National governments should transfer adequate financial resources to cities to cover the needs of the actual (versus officially registered) migrant and refugee population.² International organizations, international financial institutions and development banks should open access for local governments to loans, grants and other funding opportunities. Initiatives such as the Global Cities Fund show how local governments can lead inclusive action, e.g., on climate mobility, when they are able to access international funding.^{viii}

Furthermore, donors supporting migration/refugee projects in cities need to move from short-term, project-based funding to a combination of project and institutional funding focusing on medium-term timeframes to strengthen capacities of local governments and civil society actors.

Strengthen Bottom-Up Data Collection

Obtaining reliable data on migration and displacement is a challenge at all levels of governance, but particularly at the local level. International organizations and national statistical offices should disaggregate data to the urban level to strengthen local policy planning.

Furthermore, international organisations and national governments should support the creation of networks of local data centres. Contrary to national census data that is only collected once a decade and mostly focuses on citizens and registered migrants and refugees, coordinated bottom-up approaches could be carried out on a more regular basis and organised in modules to respond to context-specific data needs of local governments while providing comparative data across urban spaces to the national and international level. A modular approach would also allow introducing various firewalls to ensure adequate data protection.

As African intermediary cities are becoming hubs of migration and displacement, local governments increasingly realise that their cities cannot afford to be spaces of human mobility without also transforming into actors. Locally led multi-stakeholder partnerships can enable actors from different levels of governance to address urbanization and human mobility on the African continent in inclusive ways. However, the Equal Partnerships research project also demonstrates that systemic and sustainable change will only take place with political, financial and judicial support from national governments and by overcoming policy-making shaped by populist narratives. Cooperative migration governance, promoted by African intermediary cities and supported by national political commitments, can encourage multi-stakeholder action aligned with human rights and guided by principles of dignity, inclusivity and sustainability.

² This would also require to enhance the access of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons to registration in intermediary cities and the creation of adequate registration capacities and tools.

To explore our city studies and hear from our project partners on the ground, visit the Equal Partnerships website:

www.equal-partnerships.com



Endnotes

- i Cities Alliance (n.d.): [The Role of Secondary Cities in a National System of Cities](#). Cities Alliance.
- ii Janina Stürner-Siovitz, Lasse Juhl Morthorst (2023): [Migration in African intermediary cities: why multi-stakeholder partnerships are key to inclusive action](#). OECD Development matters.
- iii Florence Lozet (2023): [Sustainable integration – Reflections on local interventions and urban refugee policy](#). Cities Alliance.
- iv Janina Stürner-Siovitz, Lasse Juhl Morthorst (2023): [Equal Partnerships – African intermediary cities as actors and partners in urban migration governance. Partnerships in Oujda, Morocco](#). Equal Partnerships. Hervé Nicolle, Daniel Provost (2023): [Equal Partnerships – African intermediary cities as actors and partners in urban migration governance. Partnerships in Sfax, Tunisia](#). Equal Partnerships.
- v Ibid.
- vi Pauline Cherunya, Daniel Provost (2023): [Equal Partnerships – African intermediary cities as actors and partners in urban migration governance. Partnerships in Garissa, Kenya](#). Equal Partnerships.
- vii Partnerships in Oujda, Morocco.
- viii MMC (2023): [The Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees](#). MMC.