



# Mayors Migration Council Written Contribution to the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants

Submitted 14 June 2021

The Mayors Migration Council<sup>1</sup> (MMC) welcomes the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants' focus on the impact of Covid-19 on the human rights of migrants in his forthcoming report to the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly.

As a mayor-led organization dedicated to helping cities influence national and international policy on migration and refugee issues, we have seen firsthand the impact of Covid-19 on migrants, most of whom live in cities. This submission provides context on the urban reality of Covid-19, details how the Mayors Migration Council responded to the needs of cities to support their migrant communities, and showcases specific city practices that highlight how mayors are leading on inclusive pandemic response and recovery and ensuring that no one is left behind in their communities because of their migratory status.

## 1. Context

- **95 percent of reported Covid-19 cases in 2020 were in urban areas**, according to UN-Habitat.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing this reality, the UN Secretary-General asserted in July 2020, "cities are bearing the brunt of the crisis—many with strained health systems, inadequate water and sanitation services, and other challenges...But cities are also home to extraordinary solidarity and resilience."<sup>3</sup>
- While the pandemic has impacted all people and aspects of society, it presents **unique challenges to urban migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people (IDPs) due to their legal and migration status, their reliance on informal employment, and their restricted access to public health services and benefits**. Their experiences are complicated by language and cultural barriers, xenophobia, racism, and discrimination.
- These challenges often fall to city governments to address, as **most migrants live in cities as do 60 percent of the world's refugees and 80 percent of internally displaced people (IDPs)**.<sup>4</sup>
- Mayors and city governments from all over the world have shown leadership in responding to the needs of their migrants and displaced communities during Covid-19, especially where national governments have stepped back. **City governments have led the way in building powerful,**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/covid-19/key-facts-and-data>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-urban-world#:~:text=Urban%20areas%20are%20ground%20zero,sanitation%20services%2C%20and%20other%20challenges.&text=But%20cities%20are%20also%20home%20to%20extraordinary%20solidarity%20and%20resilience.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/the-power-of-cities/>

**innovative, and inclusive responses—such as equal access to Covid-19 testing and vaccines, direct cash assistance regardless of status, or water and sanitation services in underserved neighborhoods—as detailed by the Mayors Migration Council’s Inclusive Pandemic Response Resource Hub and City Action Tracker.**<sup>5</sup>

- But these leaders are asked to do more with less. The economic devastation of the pandemic has led to **dire budget shortfalls and lost revenue, with estimates up to 65 percent for African cities<sup>6</sup>, according to UN-Habitat, and 25 percent globally<sup>7</sup>, according to the World Bank.**
- This will curtail the ability of city governments to deliver critical services and economic opportunity to all of their residents, especially those who need it most. This loss will occur at a time when urban migration and displacement continues to rise and the risk of Covid-19 is set to linger in low to middle-income countries, further impacting the public health and economies of cities.
- **To fill this clear and growing need, the Mayors Migration Council quickly set up the Global Cities Fund on Inclusive Pandemic Response** (the Fund) in collaboration with UN-Habitat, the UN Migration Agency (IOM), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).<sup>8</sup>
- **The Fund provides rapid support to city-level projects that address the urgent needs of migrants, refugees, and IDPs while empowering local leadership to institute inclusive practices that can be scaled and replicated elsewhere.** In its initial stage, the Fund awarded five city-led interventions in low- and middle-income in January 2021.
- The inaugural five cities include Barranquilla, Colombia; Beirut, Lebanon; Lima, Peru; Freetown, Sierra Leone; and Mexico City, Mexico. Collectively, **these cities will deliver projects that directly improve the lives of over 3,000 migrants, refugees, IDPs, and marginalized host residents** while strengthening each city’s commitment and capacity to sustainably support countless more.
- To build on the success of the Global Cities Fund and meet the needs of migrants where they live, **the Mayors Migration Council and its Strategic Partners put out a Call to Action: 22 by 2022.**<sup>9</sup> We collectively call on international actors focused on migration and displacement to work with the Mayors Migration Council to provide at least 22 cities in low to middle-income countries with the financial support to realize smart and inclusive projects centered on migrants, refugees, and IDPs by the end of 2022.

## 2. City Practices

### Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response Projects

- **Barranquilla, Colombia:** Barranquilla’s Global Cities Fund project, *Todos Somos Barranquilla*, offers a comprehensive suite of services to 100 clients, providing them with specialized vocational training, psychosocial support, legal documentation support, and direct access to 200 of Barranquilla’s employers. Focused on Venezuelan refugees, these clients include women, youth,

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-covid19>

<sup>6</sup> [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/covid-19\\_in\\_african\\_cities\\_impacts\\_responses\\_and\\_policies2.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/covid-19_in_african_cities_impacts_responses_and_policies2.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/cities-are-front-lines-covid-19>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf-res/cta>

victims of armed conflict, and persons living with disabilities. Delivered through the city's Opportunities Center, the project ensures that its participants have a safe and secure livelihood within the city's formal economy, paving the way for a stronger and more inclusive overall workforce within the city of Barranquilla. More information available at:

<https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf-res/barranquilla-colombia>

- **Beirut, Lebanon:** Beirut's project brings healthcare services closer to those in need. With the support of the Global Cities Fund, the Municipality of Beirut is able to purchase and operate the first Beirut Mobile Health Clinic, a mobile clinic which provides free and non-discriminatory Covid-19 testing, vaccinations, and other basic medical services to individuals who are unable to access these services. The Mobile Clinic goes where it is needed most, focusing on neighborhoods with high populations of refugees, migrants, and vulnerable Lebanese that were severely impacted by the August 4th 2020 port explosion, such as those working class neighborhoods bordering the port. More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf-res/beirut-lebanon>
- **Freetown, Sierra Leone:** Freetown's Global Cities Fund project expands the city's Waste Management Micro-Enterprise Program to 40 new entrepreneurial teams to deliver waste collection services within informal settlements and to other Freetown residents. The project builds on gains made by 80 existing waste management micro-enterprises supported by the Freetown City Council. Through this expansion, the city ensures that more youth living in informal settlements, the majority of whom are rural migrants, access the opportunity to jointly improve their livelihoods. Project clients are provided with initial business investment support that includes a motorized tricycle cart, sanitation tools, business registration, training and business development mentoring. More information at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf-res/freetown-sierra-leone>
- **Lima, Peru:** Lima's Global Cities Fund project includes the opening of a new Municipal Office of Service to Migrant Neighbors in the Cercado de Lima district, which serves as a gateway for newcomers into the city. The new center offers the district's residents and workers a suite of services related to employability, health, case management for women at risk of gender-based violence, and other social services, while also connecting them to the city's existing social service centers in other areas of the city. In addition, the project promotes healthy interaction between long standing residents of Lima and their new neighbors through intercultural activities within public urban spaces. More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf-res/lima-peru>
- **Mexico City, Mexico:** Mexico City's project expands their municipal income protection program to provide cash assistance to internally displaced persons while connecting them to national and local social services. The city's project expands this program to 450 people in need of social assistance while connecting their families to support services related to employability, obtaining personal identification, public health services, and referrals to Mexico City's robust governmental, civil society and non-profit social services network. The project represents the city government's first multi-secretariat collaboration and paves the way for a stronger coordination of social services to all residents of Mexico City. More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf-res/mexico-city-mexico>

## Other City-led Inclusive Pandemic Response Practices

- **Athens, Greece:** Faced with an unprecedented number of migrant and refugee arrivals during his tenure as Mayor of Athens (2011-2019), Mr. Georgios Kaminis worked to mobilize all the forces of the city to devise smart solutions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in his community. He launched the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant & Refugee issues (ACCMR) in 2015.<sup>10</sup> This Centre serves as a coordination hub between actors working at the city-level including municipal bodies, local and international NGOs, and international organizations on issues ranging from temporary accommodation to the integration of newcomers. With this coordination infrastructure already in place, in March 2020, the ACCMR and member organizations created a public mapping tool of COVID-19 prevention and response services available to vulnerable groups, including of migrants and refugees. The objective of this map is “to provide the actors involved in the protection and integration of vulnerable groups—including refugees and migrants—with the necessary information so that they can cooperate more effectively.”<sup>11</sup> Importantly the [ACCMR](https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-city-spotlight/athens) prioritizes and aims to promote “services that are not limited to beneficiaries subscribed to specific programs, but instead are open to all vulnerable groups.”<sup>12</sup> More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-city-spotlight/athens>
- **Bristol, UK:** In response to the Covid-19 crisis, the City of Bristol took more than 300 homeless people into emergency accommodation. Within this group were several migrants with “No Recourse to Public Funds” status, which prevents them from accessing mainstream state support. Bristol therefore set up a “One City Task Force” made up of representatives from Local Government, civil society, and others to identify the necessary support and longer-term pathways for everyone in emergency accommodation, including migrants and those seeking asylum.
- **Los Angeles, US:** In response to the Covid-19 crisis, the City of Los Angeles established a new, innovative direct cash assistance program—the Angeleno Card—for residents who fall below the poverty line and do not qualify for other federal aid that excludes undocumented immigrants and informal sector workers. Mayor Eric Garcetti’s Office, and the nonprofit the Mayor’s Fund for Los Angeles, raised over \$36million to fund the project and distributed it to over 100,000 Angelenos. The City also ensures that testing is available to all residents, regardless of symptoms, insurance or immigration status. Additionally, seeing that many lower-income communities (including immigrants) were not able to access drive-through testing sites run by the city, the city established walk-up sites with locations in underserved communities. More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-city-spotlight/los-angeles-united-states>
- **Milan, Italy:** Located at the epicenter of Italy’s outbreak, the City of Milan worked to build COVID-19 response and recovery plans inclusive of all residents regardless of status and to meet Mayor Giuseppe Sala’s vision for the future of his city—“growth and solidarity”—even in times of crisis. From March to June 2020, Milan collected 600 tons of donated food and distributed 1.6million meals to the most vulnerable residents—reaching some 20,000 people with meals and providing another 15,800 with free food vouchers. The city also collected donations of personal computers and tablets to ensure that unaccompanied migrant children maintained equal access

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.accmr.gr/en/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.accmr.gr/en/news/855-active-services-for-vulnerable-groups-including-migrants-and-refugees-in-athens.html?art=1>

<sup>12</sup> Idib.

to education and Italian language classes. Additionally, Milan partnered with the nonprofit EMERGENCY to provide Covid-19 monitoring in shelters for homeless people and unaccompanied migrant youth as part of their “Service Centre for Unaccompanied Migrant Minors” (part of the national SIPROIMI, formerly SPRAR system). Through this joint “Welcome Project”, emergency teams of healthcare and logistics experts conduct daily monitoring in over 50 shelters in Milan. More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-city-spotlight/milan-italy>

- **Montreal, Canada:** The City of Montreal has advocated for the government of Quebec and Canada to regularize the immigration status of health workers who have contributed to the COVID-19 urgent response. In response to the COVID crisis, the City converted public transport buses into mobile clinics to increase the number of screenings for COVID-19 in neighborhoods home to a large number of refugees and asylum seekers that are far from access to healthcare.<sup>13</sup>
- **São Paulo, Brazil:** Throughout the pandemic, Mayor Bruno Covas worked to ensure meaningful social and economic support to all residents of the City of São Paulo, regardless of migration or refugee status. The City took direct action to expand services for all vulnerable residents — including food provision, direct cash assistance, and emergency housing. The City adapted its elected Municipal Council of Immigrants and Refugees to meet virtually, continuing their efforts to ensure the City’s pandemic relief is directly advised by and responsive to the needs of their migrant communities. To ensure equitable access to services for immigrants, the city created a multilingual step-by-step instruction guide on how to request emergency assistance from the Federal Government. They also established a Connect the Dots Project (*Projeto Ligue os Pontos*) to bridge the gap between farmers, cooks, and families in need of food. This project identified rural farmers in São Paulo struggling to sell their produce, connected them with refugee and migrant kitchen workers to produce meals, and then distributed those meals to families in need. Additionally, in summer 2020, São Paulo and UNHCR launched a joint Standard Operational Protocol to guide assistance to the transgender migrant and refugee community. Existing challenges facing the transgender migrant and refugee community were exacerbated by Covid-19, increasing demands for access to social assistance services and food aid. The city deemed it essential to encourage efforts to disseminate information and create safe spaces for transgender migrant and refugee residents. More information available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-city-spotlight/sao-paulo>
- **Zürich, Switzerland:** The City of Zürich organized several multilingual services to support migrants and refugees during the COVID crisis. This includes a centralized, multilingual, and accessible internet platform run by the city to ensure immigrant and refugee communities in Zürich have access to information about the pandemic including access to support, city contacts, and general information in their own language.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, since the beginning of the pandemic the city organized telephone hotlines, WhatsApp channels, and published flyers in multiple languages for refugees. The City of Zürich provided the necessary financial resources to ensure emergency financial aid and access to necessary medical care for migrants without legal status who live in Zürich.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1699941/depistage-montreal-coronavirus-bus-transport>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/gud/de/index/gesundheitsversorgung/public-health/coronavirus-sars-cov-2/otherlanguages.html>