



## Strengthening the Capacities of Local Authorities in the Reception and Integration of Migrants and Refugees: Concept Note

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Organization of American States (OAS)

### I. Introduction and justification

According to the United Nations, by 2019 there was an estimated of 272 million international migrants worldwide, representing 3.5% of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> In the Americas, there were an estimated of 70.3 million international migrants, among those 58.6 million in North America and 11.7 million in Latin America and the Caribbean. In turn, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2019, there were 8,295,002 million internally displaced persons, 1,902,133 asylum seekers, 701,652 refugees and people in a similar situation as refugees, at least 4,052 stateless persons,<sup>2</sup> and large numbers of returned and deported migrants across the countries of the Americas.

Some of the main mixed migratory movements in recent years have been the mass migration of Venezuelans across Latin America and the Caribbean; the so-called "caravans" of people from the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) and the historical, but also in many cases forced migration of Nicaraguans, which has largely been towards Costa Rica; the serious situation of displacement of Colombian people who have to flee as a result of various forms of violence; the historical migration of Haitians and Cubans; the migration of Peruvians and Bolivians mainly to Argentina and Chile; and the situation of extracontinental migrants from countries in Africa and the Middle East who cross several countries in South and Central America in order to reach the United States. By July 2020, some 5.2 million Venezuelans had left their country. This is the largest exodus in the region recent history and the second biggest displacement crisis in the world, after the Syrian crisis.

In addition to the above, the impacts of the lockdowns, quarantines, physical and social distancing measures, restrictions on free movement, and the closings of borders that are being adopted by States in the region to counter the spread of COVID-19, as well as the direct and indirect effects of this pandemic on the economy and livelihoods will be a determining factor in the decision to migrate for thousands of people in the near future, in particular for those in situations of vulnerability.

The presence of mass mixed migration movements have posed several challenges for origin, transit, destination and return countries in the region. Some of these challenges include the reception at borders, access to documentation, regularization and access to international protection, socio-economic and cultural integration, and equal access to rights and public services in transit and destination countries. In addition, more restrictive measures have been adopted, including border rejections, collective expulsions or deportations, unaffordable documentation requirements and acts of xenophobia and violence against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> UN, International migrant stock 2019.

<sup>2</sup> UNCHR, Global Trends 2019.



All these challenges are far greater at the local level when dealing with the arrival of migrants and refugees in municipalities and peripheral cities. This is in part due to the remote and isolated location of these cities and to some degree to the lack of State presence at the national level. This leads to further limitations in terms of the integration and socio-economic inclusion of these people and the host communities, and in many cases these places become areas of exception and exclusion in terms of human rights.

Local governments are the main political bodies in charge of ruling local communities. As such they have the main responsibility for providing essential services and are in a unique position to generate significant change and act rapidly, since they are the first public institutions to receive and the first point of entry to provide services to migrants and refugees. Therefore, these local authorities must provide services with a human rights approach, and with flexible and responsive planning and implementation. Similarly, local governments play a key role in the economic growth of countries and should take into consideration the role and contribution of migrants and refugees to the development of local communities.

At the same time, cities and their governments have had to assume a significant cost to receive and integrate the massive movements of migrants and refugees. In addition, local authorities face several challenges in the inclusion of migrants and refugees, ranging from insufficient financial resources and technical capacities to lack of alternatives for the integration of migrants, and the attention of migrants and refugees in street situation, to the lack of adequate coordination between national and local governments.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, migrants and refugees make a significant contribution to human and productive development in the receiving countries, such as to the GDP growth through increased consumption and young and skilled labor; as well as to the transfer of knowledge and the enrichment of cultural and social heritage.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the arrival of migrants and refugees plays a part into the strengthening of the cultural and social enrichment of the receiving countries, benefiting from the exchanges of new ideas and perspectives created by the culture mixing. It is essential, then, to support governments in taking advantage of the full potential of the arrival of migrants and refugees and to help them to demystify migration as a negative phenomenon.

Therefore, it is necessary to have a space for dialogue on the role of local authorities in the attention, protection, integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees, to identify key actions for their settlement and integration, for their incorporation into existing policies and programs, and also to share good practices and lessons learned, as well as to propose new and innovative solutions.

In this regard, the OAS Department of Social Inclusion together with the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), organized the colloquium on "The Role of Local Authorities in Cities Hosting Migrants and Refugees: Lessons from Colombia," which took place on December 4, 2019, in Washington, D.C.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See UNESCO y ONU-HABITAT, Inclusión de los migrantes en las ciudades. Políticas y prácticas urbanas innovadoras, 2012, pp. 34-39.

<sup>4</sup> See MPI, An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean Responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan Migration, February 2020, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> The speakers of the event were Mr. Felipe Muñoz, Presidential Advisor for the Border with Venezuela; Ms. Gladys San Miguel, Secretary of Social Inclusion of Bogota; Mr. Pepe Ruiz Paredes, Mayor of Villa del Rosario (Norte de Santander); Mr. Misael Arturo Velasquez, Mayor of Fonseca (La Guajira) and Ms. Miriam Margot Martínez, First Lady of Ipiales (Nariño). The event also included the participation of Mr. Matt Potter, Director of Democracy, Governance and Human



## II. General objective:

To strengthen the capacities of local authorities involved in the reception, assistance, protection and socio-economic and cultural integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as promoting the sharing of good practices, lessons learned and proposals for solutions based on evidence.

## III. Proposed Products and Results

1. Data Collection instruments and methodology for the gathering of information to produce a needs assessment.
2. An analytical report based on the results from the needs assessment, including a compilation of good practices in the reception and integration of migrants and refugees by local authorities.
3. A communication and outreach strategy.
4. An interactive Regional Network of Local Authorities and a community of practice created using an online platform to share knowledge, experiences and lessons learned in the protection and integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.
5. A massive open online course (MOOC) delivered to local authorities on the reception and integration of migrants and refugees.
6. A regional competition and award for the best projects designed by the local authorities enrolled in the MOOC for the reception and integration of migrants and refugees into local communities. The awards will consist in three cash prizes to be awarded to the local authorities for the implementation of the best projects.

## IV. Proposed Activities

### ○ Activity 1: Virtual High Level Launch of the Project

A virtual High Level Launch event of the project with the participation of the top authorities of each participating institution will be planned with participation of key local authorities and other relevant actors. Format still need to be further developed.

### ○ Activity 2: Development of an outreach and communications strategy

Amidst the crisis generated by the pandemic of COVID-19, which has required the implementation of measures such as travel and mobility restrictions, quarantines, lockdowns and physical distancing, it is crucial and strategic to develop and implement since the beginning of the project a communications and outreach strategy to engage with local authorities and other key stakeholders that will be participating in the project as well as promoting the participation of migrant and refugee diasporas and their host communities. The strategy will also serve to publicize the different activities of the project and to disseminate key results and milestones using different channels and communication materials (social media, videos, press releases, etc). Another of the objectives of the communications and outreach strategy is to

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Rights at PADF; Ms. Yesica Noemi Fonseca Martinez, President of the OAS Committee on Migration Issues (CAM); and Ms. Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, Director of the Department of Social Inclusion at the Organization of American States.

serve to change common negative narratives around migrants and refugees, which may fuel xenophobia, discrimination and violence against these persons in these times of crisis.

- **Activity 3: Drafting of an assessment on the reception and integration of migrants and refugees by local authorities**

The assessment on the reception and integration of migrants and refugees by local authorities will aim, on the one hand, to identify the needs of local authorities for the reception and integration of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and local communities, and on the other, to compile lessons learned and good practices of local governments in the reception and integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The assessment will also address particular needs of other subgroups in vulnerable situations such as girls and women and the effects of gender based violence, children and adolescents, indigenous people, among others.

The assessment will be conducted by a multidisciplinary research team and its development will comprise the following steps: i) selection of consultants (researchers) responsible of the collection of the information, ii) drafting of questionnaires to gather information, iii) conduction of interviews with local authorities and other relevant stakeholders, iv) systematization and analysis of the information, v) drafting, vi) graphic design and vii) final publication of the assessment results.

- **Activity 4: Creation of a virtual regional network of local authorities for the protection and integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees through an online platform.**

Based on the information collected during the needs assessment, an online platform will be created in order to serve 3 main purposes. First, the platform will function as a repository to upload and publish the assessment as well as the compilation of good practices, and other resources and tools. At the same time, the platform will serve as a community of practice<sup>6</sup> and forum where local authorities can exchange their views and lessons learned with other peers from the region. Lastly, it will serve as a communication tool to disseminate the activities of the project and of the Network in parallel to the stage of the preparation of the assessment. Finally, the platform will also have an intranet function for local authorities and partners in this project as a tool to facilitate constant communication on project activities and exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

- **Activity 5: Development of curricula for the delivery of a massive open online course (MOOC) for local authorities on the reception and integration of migrants and refugees**

Based on the assessment and the compilation of good practices, materials will be developed in key thematic areas to train and increase the capacities of local authorities on the inclusion and integration of migrants and refugees. The curricula can include areas such as employment, socio-economic integration, social protection and social services, education, psychological support, gender based violence assistance, interculturality, diversity and inclusion, prevention of racism and xenophobia, leadership, design and implementation of public policies and projects, fundraising, among others. The materials will be developed at least in English and Spanish and potentially Portuguese. This activity will leverage partners existing capacities and partnerships with Academic institutions throughout the region.

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<sup>6</sup> A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a craft, profession or concern for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

- **Activity 6: Regional competition and awards for best projects of local authorities for the reception and integration of migrants, refugees and host communities**

A competition to recognize local/municipal inclusive, creative and innovative projects will be launched within the participants of the MOOC. The competition will award the 3 best projects designed by municipal authorities in key areas for integrating migrants and refugees into local communities (specific criteria to be defined), with the support of MOOC tutors and teachers. This component aims not only to bring visibility but also to further empower municipal decision-makers to facilitate reception and integration and access to migrants and refugees at the local level. This will also highlight the benefits and positive contributions that bring the development of public policies in favor of the reception and integration of migrants and refugees for the cities and to expedite the inclusion of migrants and refugees within host communities. Likewise, the award will generate a sense of belonging to the project and its components, as well as guarantee the involvement of tutors and teachers throughout the training process. The awards will incorporate a sum of money to be aimed at the implementation of the awarded projects at the local level.

#### V. Partners:

The proposed activities leverage on the complementary strengths that all the partners of this partnership can bring to a joint project in particular:

1. The Secretariat for Access to Rights and Equity of the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Department of Social Inclusion (DSI), will leverage the OAS convening power as the main political forum in the Hemisphere to assemble various actors, stakeholders and political forces and facilitate regional consensus and cooperation frameworks with strong political support.
2. The International Organization for Migration (IOM)
3. The Pan American Development Foundation (PADF)
4. The Migration Team of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
5. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
6. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
7. The International Labour Organization (ILO)
8. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
9. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN)
10. The Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration at Ryerson University and within it the Cities of Migration Program
11. Club de Madrid.

- **Other Potential partners:**

Other potential partners for this project could be: UNICEF, UN-HABITAT, Open Society Foundations, AECID, among others.

#### VI. Project Governance

The present project will be implemented through a Project Coordination Committee lead by the OAS, and with focal points from each partner organization that will make decisions on the main elements of the project. In particular, they will approve the questionnaire for the interviews with

local authorities, contribute with inputs for the topics to be addressed in the Digital Platform, the MOOC topics, among others tasks.