



COSMOPOLITAN URBANISM:
URBAN POLICIES FOR THE SOCIAL AND SPATIAL INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS
Expert Group Meeting

International migrations and the “Right to the City”¹

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The growing importance of cities as migration destination

While globalisation has dramatically enhanced the free movement across borders of goods, firms and money, it has failed to bring down barriers to the free movement of individuals. As a matter of fact, in recent years most governments have persistently intensified the control measures on the movement of people and their security-oriented migration policies, well before but increasingly so since the terrorist attack to the Twin Towers. Yet, in the same years the flow of international migration did not stop growing, so that “the number of people living outside their countries of birth is larger than any other time in history” (UNFPA, 2006). In 2005 migrants numbered 191 million worldwide, a 23% increase since 1990. By far the largest increase (41 million) was registered in the high-income countries (United Nations, 2005), but a recent estimate suggests that South-South migration accounts for 47% of all migration from the South (74 million), most likely to be greater once irregular migration is taken into account, highlighting that the number of people migrating from the South to other developing countries is very similar to the number of South-North migrants (Ratha, Shaw, 2007). People move not only because the movement of capital, goods and skilled professionals is an integral part of present day open economies, including the middle and low-income ones. As a result of increasing economic and social inequalities, migrating is also an integral component of family and community strategies to improve the living conditions of those who migrate as well as of those who remain.

What is growing in particular is the number of migrants moving to the cities, including cities of developing countries. Though no overall estimate of foreign-born urban residents is currently available for, among others, lack of any systematic observation and data comparability (Benton-Short, Price, Friedman, 2005), the scattered information on hand shows that migrants are heading more and more towards cities (Balbo, 2005; Habitat

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Debate, 2006). The increasing 'urbanization of migration' is the inevitable consequence of the growing urbanization occurring worldwide but in particular in the South, while being at the same time partly responsible for it.

Though manifold, the reasons behind the current urban oriented migration are fairly obvious.

Principal destinations and nodes of globalisation, nowadays cities constitute more and more a crucible of people, cultures, traditions and lifestyles (Hamburger, 2003). Since cities, not only in developed but also in developing countries, concentrate nearly all the existing modern societal functions such as trade, investment, social services supply, know-how exchange, communications, they provide the best chances for finding income opportunities and for accessing education, health care, housing and infrastructures. Second, in the context of globalisation cities have produced a new demand for low-paid service workers for different types of jobs and, particularly in developing countries, it is in the city that migrants can access the large and expanding informal sector. Migrants often work, formally and informally, undertaking domestic jobs eschewed by the local population and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the informal economy, including those on the borderline with illegality or beyond. Third, ethnic, family or village-based networks can be accessed more easily in cities, where multiple networks represent the principal support for the newcomers when looking for a house or a job (Massey, Aysa, 2006). This becomes even more evident when taking into account the 'feminization of migration': at present women represent almost half of all international migrants and a much higher share in the flows to the high-income economies. With the density of social interactions they offer, cities provide much more favorable prospects to those who want to settle and provide a variety of opportunities the rural environment cannot match. Finally, for a large number of migrants cities are the main entry points to the host countries, even when smuggled in. For 'transit migrants' in particular, those who intend to stay for only a short period of time in a country before moving on to their final destinations in a third country (Council of Europe, 2004), cities are crucial nodes that shape their routes.

Migrants and the urban economy

It is increasingly evident that migrants represent a fundamental resource for the urban economies of the destination countries, as well as for the economy of recipient countries which receive tremendous benefits from remittances.

There is an increasing demand for professionals and managers lured by multinationals looking for highly skilled personnel to fill in positions open in the various countries they operate. Nevertheless, the majority of migrants, both legal and undocumented, including skilled professionals, are employed in low-paid jobs local residents are no longer willing or prepared to take up at going wages. In some cities the foreign population fill in whole sectors of the economy – usually referred to as the four Ds: dirty, difficult, demeaning and dangerous - such as garbage collection, city-wide express mail delivery and porter's jobs. For this reason, despite perceptions to the contrary, the impact legal as well undocumented migrants have on the employment and wage levels of the local population is modest, since migrants actually complement the local workers who can perform more productive and better paid jobs (UNFPA, 2006).

With globalisation cities that are or aim to be part of the financial and technological flows need to rely on the contribution international migrants provide in supporting the economic dynamism of cities and promoting their productivity. In fact, it is increasingly evident that the presence of migrants does not affect the economic conditions of the local population, quite to the contrary it contributes to overall growth and to higher employment (The Economist, 2006). In addition, migrants provide the cosmopolitanism that increasingly represents a value added for the existing and would be 'global cities' (Duany, 2002), contributing to the

quality of life highly paid managers, executives and brokers look for when deciding whether to take a job that will take them to some distant city.

The economic impact of migration on the countries of origin is also crucial. According to the data available, in 2006 the officially recorded remittances to developing countries are in the realm of \$200 billion, well beyond and a much more stable source of income than development aid from developed countries. In addition they appear to be steadily growing, up from \$85 billion in the year 2000 (World Bank, 2007). In fact, once unrecorded remittances that go through formal as well as informal channels are taken into account, the real size of remittances is estimated to be at least 50 percent larger (World Bank, 2005). For a number of countries, such as Lebanon, Tajikistan, Honduras and Jordan, officially recorded remittances represent more than 20 percent of GDP, up to 38% in Moldova (World Bank, 2007).

Though the implications of remittances on the long term development and income inequality of recipient countries is still unclear and questioned (Katseli et. Al., 2006; Taylor, 2006; World Bank, 2006) the short term positive impact on poverty is acknowledged. Remittances sent by migrants have allowed countries as different as Morocco, Nicaragua and Yemen to reduce the number of people living in poverty (ECLAC, 2005, World Bank, 2007).

Governments of both hosting and sending countries must acknowledge that international migration is a structural element of present-day open economies and a crucial way to improve the living conditions of those who migrate, as well as of those who remain.

Migrants and urban policies

Inadequate migration policies, or lack thereof, make it difficult to adequately cater for their needs, in particular housing and services. Decentralization policies entrust local governments with the responsibility of managing the impact that international migration has on urban growth (*immigrants policies* vs central government *immigration policies*). Yet, not very many cities have explicit policies dealing with international migration (Balbo, 2005; UN-Habitat, 2004), even though there can be no doubt that migration will continue for many years to come. As a result, the response to the demands rising from the migrants communities are often left to the capacity of a single department within the municipality, not rarely to individuals.

The lack of adequate public policies may have many consequences. It often drives international migrants to settle among their own community and close to where they may find the support they need, thus feeding the spatial fragmentation pattern and the multiplication of identities that are increasingly emerging in the city of developed as well as developing countries (Castles, 2002; United Nations, 2006). Unless appropriately managed international migration may also translate into a primary source of social conflict. Cultural and religious differences are not easily accepted and the appearance of ethnic enclaves may be perceived as a threat by the local population, in particular the more vulnerable groups. Finally, when feeling marginalized the migrants communities are obviously hardly willing to enter into a dialogue with the local society, even less with the government, resulting in a growing breach between them and the hosting society that can easily end up into animosity and antagonism.

To be effective, policies must acknowledge that migrants are not a homogeneous group of people and that different cultural, religious and educational backgrounds generate different perspectives on the notions of inclusion and citizenship. The social inclusion of international migrants depends largely on the positions they fill in the local economy, the socio-cultural conditions of the host city, the settlement pattern migrants privilege or are constrained to adopt, including the use they make of public space, as well as the migrants own willingness to be 'included'. Though many migrants arrive with the intention to put down roots in the new city, the advances in technologies of communication and transport allow to maintain much stronger family, commercial or other types of links with the home country than in the

past. Moreover, since migration flows are increasingly of a temporary and circulatory nature a growing number of migrants considers the city a place to pass through while waiting to return home. Sense of belonging and transnational attitudes are not necessarily antithetical to one another, but local governments must acknowledge and understand the dynamics standing under the two options.

Accordingly, to properly deal with the presence of international migrants the first issues to be addressed are, on one hand, having a clear understanding of the composite features of the phenomenon, on the other hand the need to shape migration policies so as to target the needs and priorities of the different migrants communities. Information on migrants is far from accurate, particularly in the cities of developing countries making it problematic to design sound policies (Balbo, 2005). Formal and informal contacts with the migrant communities are crucial in helping bridge the gap of understanding between international migrants and local residents. Media can also play a crucial role by pointing to the migrants needs and priorities as well as the potential they have to offer, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and to forge an unbiased perception of the migrants presence.

In order to meet migrants diverse needs, programmes have to be properly targeted. International migrants may have different priorities, depending on their social background and cultural traditions, which may conflict with those of other migrant groups, or with the local community. In addition, policies distinguishing among communities are not only difficult to design, but unless openly explained they may be looked at as discriminatory thus producing effects contrary to those being pursued.

For local governments moving from 'territory based' to 'population based' policies is certainly not an easy task, particularly in the cities of the South where to a large extent migrants add to the low-income population already living in inadequate housing conditions, scarce or no access to basic services and environmentally hazardous areas.

Nevertheless, experience from all over shows that unless tailored to the specific needs of the different communities, immigrants policies are not very successful (UN-Habitat, 2004).

Many cities, in particular in the South but also in the North, simply do not have the knowledge or the tools to address migration and development issues. As highlighted by the Global Forum on Migration and Development recently held in Brussels, there is an urgent need for capacity building on a whole set of issues related to migration ranging from data collection to devising appropriate policy tools as well as identifying potential partners for their implementation.

In this respect cultural mediation has a critical role to play if effective access to social services and housing is to be facilitated. NGOs and community groups can help channelling the support services needed by migrants, such as legal advice, health and educational services. NGOs can also play the crucial role of cultural mediators between local institutions and the foreign communities, amplifying the voices of migrants, increasing their influence and promoting their empowerment.

Promoting the migrants Right to the city

International migration raises the essential issue of the 'Right to the City', i.e., the right for everyone, including international migrants, to access the benefits the city has to offer. Due to the absence or inadequacy of targeted policies geared to their integration, international migrants are often denied access to urban services, are frequently excluded from the available urban opportunities, and nearly never have a voice in decision-making, even more so if 'temporary' or 'transit' (Council of Europe, 2004; Cassarino, Fargues, 2006). Nevertheless, how best to promote migrant inclusion in the decision-making process remains a crucial issue to encourage citizenship and inclusion (Unesco, 2006). Inclusion has implications for any commitment to 'urban citizenship' by both host and migrant communities and the emergence of an international migration with limited commitment to

the host community can lead to decay in civic values. In this perspective, inclusion can be seen as a compact between migrants and host communities whereby they share certain civic values while other factors of diversity are kept untouched. The nature of these civic values can be derived from general principles of civic responsibility as applied to international migration, but the key function of negotiating suitable, context-specific value sets falls to city administrations, in consultation with the citizenry as a whole. In this perspective education is crucial, since comparable levels of education make it easier for migrants to opt for the 'integration strategy' instead of entrenching their own original identities.

Ethnic diversity often stirs up anxiety and fear among local residents, particularly where there is limited or no multicultural tradition as in the cities of the South. Legitimizing cultural distance is one of the challenges of multiculturalism, calling for recognition or even strengthening of 'cultural shields' between different urban populations, all the more so against a background of increasing transnationalism that tends to undermine the sense of belonging. Developing a shared sense of citizenship or a common identity through an inclusive strategy in a multicultural perspective is a challenging task. However, heterogeneous, multicultural cities seem to be better equipped than homogeneous ones to cope with the economic, social and cultural challenges linked to globalisation. Multiculturalism and inclusion point to two major directions: i) migrants belong to communities, and *inclusive policies should address the communities, rather than the individuals* and, ii) since migrant communities are different from each other, *inclusion cannot be viewed as a single, static concept*; rather, it should be referred to as *inclusions*: which type of inclusion, for which migrant community, and over what period of time.

Although urban policies in many parts of the world tend to move away from this trend, multicultural cities are likely, inevitable as well as desirable outcomes of current economic and social changes around the globe. In future and more than ever, cities will need to evolve from multicultural to cosmopolitan – i.e., from a situation where multiple cultural forms are recognized and at times encouraged, to one in which residents of one cultural background are personally comfortable interacting with those of other cultures (Beck, 2006). If it is to be liberal, a society will be open to accept anyone who wants to become part of it, banning him or her only under specific conditions, not the reversal. Similarly, if it is to be a *polis*, cities in the North as well as in the South must ensure the inclusion of all its residents and tackle urban exclusion building new collective identities and countering the individualism which liberalisation and privatisation combine.

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