

Proposal for a Mayors Mechanism in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

1 August 2018

NON-PAPER¹

I. CONTEXT

The last few years have seen a rapid growth in awareness and recognition of the role of cities and local governments in addressing global governance challenges, including international migration. This “rise of cities” is rooted in several broader trends, including historically unsurpassed rates of urbanization in all parts of the world² and a growing trend towards devolution, meaning the transfer of decision-making power from national to sub-national levels of government. While seventy five percent of the developed world is considered decentralized today, constraints on decentralization remain widespread in the developing world, particularly in Africa where cities are growing most rapidly. Increasing inequality within countries often coincides with geographic disparities, highlighting the need for localized sustainable development strategies to leave no region behind. Similarly, the impacts of climate and environmental change are often felt unevenly across a country’s territory and require local approaches to adaptation and resilience-building.

Thus, local governance is becoming an increasingly decisive factor in how well societies are equipped to address a range of sustainable development challenges from climate change, to education, economic development, and the peaceful coexistence of diverse populations (to name but a few). Recent policy frameworks, notably the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action, and the New Urban Agenda on Sustainable Urban Development³

¹ *The contents of this non-paper are shaped by conversations since 2013 between mayors, senior city executives and Colleen Thouez (Director of the Welcoming and Integrated Societies Division, OSF). This non-paper was developed by Sarah Rosengaertner (Columbia Global Policy Initiative), with contributions from Colleen Thouez, Stefan Rother (University of Freiburg), Nathan Benson (University of Ottawa), and Maggie Powers (Columbia University).*

It serves to help converge thinking on engagement with cities in multilateral work on migration, and current investigatory work on the future of the GFMD. As such, it is intended to begin a constructive discussion on how a mayors mechanism could be put in place to strengthen the stakeholder engagement and overall relevance of the GFMD in future years.

² The number of people moving to urban centres is expected to almost double from 3.9 billion today to 6.4 billion by 2050 (this compares to 746 million in 1950). Cities in developing regions will grow the most, with close to 90 percent of the increase in urban dwellers concentrated in Africa and Asia. Over half the African continent will live in cities within the next decade. UN DESA, *World Urbanization Prospects*, 2014 edition.

³ Adopted and endorsed at the 68th Plenary Meeting of the 71st Session of the General Assembly held in December 2016 and available at: <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/New-Urban-Agenda-GA-Adopted-68th-Plenary-N1646655-E.pdf>

(NUA) all acknowledge the critical role of local governance for achieving global aims. So does the UN Global Compact for Migration (GCM), which was finalized on 11 July 2018 and set for adoption in December 2018.

At the Stocktaking Meeting preceding the GCM negotiations, held in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, on 4-6 December 2017, governments recognized that they cannot achieve the goal of “safe, regular and orderly migration” alone and embraced a whole-of-government approach to migration governance. In practice, this means an expanded role for local authorities, who are often the first responders to migrants’ needs. Beyond the implementation of national laws and policies, local governments also have a role to play in the development of national policies, legislation and administrative norms.

Recognition of the importance of including mayors in policy deliberations on international migration dates back to the UN General Assembly’s Second High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in October 2013, when the Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development (“Mayoral Forum”) was launched. Meeting first in Barcelona in 2014, the Mayoral Forum has become an annual gathering of municipal and regional leaders – supported by the United Nations (UN) – that promotes policy dialogue, fosters the exchange of knowledge and allows for joint strategizing on how to govern migration, while promoting social inclusion and equitable local development. The Forum has also served as a mechanism to connect mayors and local leaders to global processes such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the consultations preceding the negotiations on the GCM and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), allowing them to learn about migration and refugee policies globally, share local solutions to global policy conundrums, and to highlight obstacles, financial and material support needs at the local level.

In 2017, the Mayoral Forum was, for the first time, held back to back with the GFMD taking place in Germany. The GFMD is a voluntary, informal, non-binding and government-led process open to all State Members and Observers of the United Nations, to advance understanding and cooperation on the mutually reinforcing relationship between migration and development and to foster practical and action-oriented outcomes. It was established in 2006 to create a space for ongoing inter-governmental dialogue outside the formal arena of the United Nations, which was then deemed too political a venue for discussing migration. The GFMD has taken place annually since 2007 (except in 2013, when the 2nd High Level Dialogue was held at the UN) and has undergone a number of changes along the way both, as a result of different government chairs leaving their imprint, and in response to assessment exercises carried out in 2011, 2012 and 2014 that led to reforms in the governance, financing and operational modalities of the GFMD.

In the decade of its existence, the GFMD has played an important role for trust-building among governments – functioning as a bridge between countries of origin, transit and destination – as

well as between governments and civil society. More recently, it has begun to incorporate structured interactions with the business sector, making it the main global venue for multi-stakeholder interactions on migration policy. The GFMD has had an important “socializing” effect with governments in this regard. While it remains outside the UN, it recently strengthened its ties with the UN by assuming a voluntary reporting role in the context of the 2030 Agenda, whereby the GFMD Chair submits a report to the annual meetings of the High Level Political Forum, the platform reviewing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

The GFMD is also foreseen as a space to support implementation and the follow-up and review of the UN Global Compact for Migration. The final GCM invites the GFMD to:

- 1) “[P]rovide platforms to exchange experiences on the implementation of the Global Compact, share good practices on policies and cooperation, promote innovative approaches, and foster multi-stakeholder partnerships around specific policy issues.” (OP 47)
- 2) “[P]rovide a space for annual informal exchange on the implementation of the Global Compact, and report the findings, best practices and innovative approaches to the International Migration Review Forum.” (OP 51)
- 3) Build on the best practices of the GFMD Business Mechanism to “[p]romote inter-institutional networks and collaborative programmes for partnerships between the private sector and educational institutions in countries of origin and destination to enable mutually beneficial skills development opportunities for migrants, communities and participating partners.” (OP 34(f))

With local authorities expected to play an important role in the implementation of the GCM and other global commitments relevant to migration, and the GFMD likely to provide a key venue to share implementation experiences, a rapprochement between local governments and the GFMD is both relevant and timely. In previous Round Tables and its input to the GCM, the GFMD has acknowledged the need to involve local and regional authorities in migration and development policy making and implementation to promote policy coherence among different levels of government.⁴ In 2018, the GFMD will expand its inclusion of local authorities perspectives with Round Table 1.1 focusing on ways to empower local authorities in achieving SDG 11 and other migration related aspects of all SDGs, while Round Table 1.2 will recommend measures suitable

⁴ Background Paper Round Table 1.1 for the 2017 GFMD in Germany on Tools and Safeguards for Policy Coherence-finding the right policy mix to balance different interests and objectives <http://www.gfmd.org/docs/germany-morocco-2017-2018> ; see also: GFMD thematic recollection report 2007-2017 for the Global Compact on Migration [http://www.gfmd.org/files/documents/gfmd thematic recollection 2007 to 2017 -ibution to the gcm.pdf](http://www.gfmd.org/files/documents/gfmd%20thematic%20recollection%202007%20to%202017%20-ibution%20to%20the%20gcm.pdf).

to facilitate migrants' access to public services and their ability to have a voice and a role in those services, with a focus on the local level.

Indeed, the current Co-Chairs of the GFMD, Morocco and Germany, also agree that the inclusion of local governance, as part of a whole-of-government approach, is a very important factor in order to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration and mobility. They would welcome a more profound relationship between the Mayoral Forum and the GFMD and are in support of a more extensive participation of local authority representatives in GFMD. Ecuador, that has expressed interest in serving as the Chair of the GFMD and the host of the Mayoral Forum (as it did in 2015) again in 2019, has also supported including the voices of local authorities in intergovernmental fora.

II. PROPOSAL

Building on the growing recognition of local authorities as critical stakeholders in the migration field, and the interest of the GFMD Co-Chairs in a stronger connection to the Mayoral Forum, the proposal is to formalize this relationship such that local governments can become more consistent stakeholders in the GFMD with the opportunity to inform and be informed by states in their deliberations. This will entail transforming the annual convening of mayors, i.e. the Mayoral Forum, into a "Mayors Mechanism"⁵ for the GFMD. The Mayors Mechanism would entail both the established global annual convening of mayors (synchronized with the annual GFMD summit), and an ongoing support function for local governments in the form of a secretariat for the Mayors Mechanism. The Mayors Mechanism secretariat would facilitate coordination, technical support, representational and administrative services.

The period leading up to the GFMD summit in Marrakesh in December 2018 will serve to introduce and consult with governments on the idea of a rapprochement between local authorities and the policy deliberations among states happening at the GFMD (including, for instance, in the follow-up and review of the GCM). In parallel, conversations with partners that have signaled an early endorsement of increasing the voice of local governments in international migration governance will be pursued to refine the form and functions of the proposed "Mayors Mechanism". Ideally, the idea of the Mayors Mechanism will be introduced at the GFMD in 2018 and formally launched at the GFMD in 2019.

Pursuing a formal association of the Mayoral Forum with the GFMD would strengthen both fora:

It would add depth to the deliberations of the GFMD by helping to bridge existing divides between local realities and global policy discussions, and between migrants, civil society and national governments. Involving local governments could help frame GFMD discussions in a way

⁵ Reference to mayors is shorthand for the inclusion of sub-national levels of government writ large.

that is responsive to challenges on the ground and to learn from local solutions and innovations in response to global problems and challenges, including in relation to achieving the SDGs and the actionable commitments of the GCM. Indeed, local participation would bolster the position of the GFMD in the context of GCM implementation and follow-up as the most inclusive venue for dialogue. It can and should become a place of mobilization around partnerships for (action) delivery.

For the Mayoral Forum becoming part of the GFMD would mean institutionalizing the space that has been created, while giving it over to local leadership and city self-governance. Local governments could more directly bring their concerns to the attention of national governments, learn from global discussions and the exchange of practices, build alliances and operational partnerships with other stakeholders, and be informed about the latest evidence, innovations, tools and approaches on migration and development.

Inclusion of local and national governments in the same global forum could also have positive spill-over effects for national level policy making. By contributing to policy and institutional coherence on migration and development between different levels of government, it could support progress in delivering on the broader GCM and SDG agendas. Improved cooperation would be particularly important to realize the commitment to “leave no one behind” and to address the situation of vulnerable migrants, including those in irregular status or legal limbo, where in the absence of policy alignment, cities and local governments often struggle to navigate competing demands for immigration enforcement, on the one hand, and the responsibility to guarantee basic services and uphold fundamental rights, on the other.

III. WHAT A GFMD MAYORS MECHANISM COULD LOOK LIKE

The late Peter Sutherland, in his final report (Report of the UN Special Representative on Migration, A/71/728) called for representatives of local authorities to be systematically included in national delegations at international meetings on migration, including the GFMD. Yet, while mayors and local officials are part of the executive branch and, as such, closer to national governments than civil society and private sector stakeholders, pursuing their full inclusion in the Government Days of the GFMD is an inadequate improvement, and could easily lead to contentious dynamics around the selection of participating local delegates, rather than sustained and constructive engagement. Furthermore, the growing success of the Mayoral Forum (in levels of participation, geographic representation, partnerships and outcomes) indicates that local governments value having their own space for deliberation on the international stage. Rather than pursuing the full integration of local governments into government delegations to the GFMD, a hybrid solution is therefore proposed that maintains an independent space and selection process for city representatives yet formally associates this space with the GFMD and provides for an interface with the other GFMD stakeholders.

Inspiration for what an association of global mayors with the GFMD could look like can be drawn from the GFMD's existing mechanisms for associating both civil society and the business community. Neither the more evolved Civil Society Days (CSD) nor the relatively new Business Mechanism provide a perfect model for local governments, but each offers some useful elements.

Lessons from existing formats for stakeholder association

When the GFMD first got underway, the involvement of civil society was a rather contentious topic for governments, with the result that the early iterations of the GFMD CSD were organized back-to-back with the government meeting but had no direct interaction with it, apart from a presentation of the CSD outcomes at the government days. Since then, the relationship has evolved. In 2010, Mexico introduced the Common Space which, to this day, connects both meetings and has grown from a single session to a whole-day event.

While in the first years, private foundations such as the Ayala (Manila 2008) and the Onassis foundation (Athens 2009) organized the CSDs, since 2011 the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) has taken over this responsibility. Thus, civil society has increasingly established itself within the GFMD, setting up its own governance structures (including a Steering Group of some 30 organizations) and setting its own agenda. Whereas the topics of the annual CSD tend to mirror those at the Government Days, civil society has formulated a longer-term Eight-Point-Five-Year action agenda and is reviewing progress towards the goals formulated therein. ICMC also set up a dedicated support platform to strengthen civil society organizations' capacities for engagement in the GFMD (the MADE Network, which ended in 2017).

Thus, the CSD have evolved from an annual meeting into a continuous process that convenes meetings and engages its constituents all year round. At the GFMD summits, the CSD occupy two full days, plus the Common Space, and usually bring together about 300 participants. While civil society usually has the opportunity to present its annual budget and resource needs to the GFMD Friends of the Forum, responsibility for fundraising and the administration of funds largely lies with ICMC. Civil society engagement in the GFMD has been funded by a range of governments, the EU and several private foundations (e.g. MacArthur, OSF) over the years.

The GFMD Business Mechanism is a more recent creation, established in 2015 at the GFMD Summit in Istanbul. Unlike the CSD, it is not a global convening of business representatives on migration, but rather a mechanism that brings business voices and perspectives into the GFMD discussions and provides a platform for dialogue among companies and business associations, governments and international organizations. Each year, that dialogue is focused on a particular topic or set of topics developed by its secretariat at the International Organization of Employers (IOE), in consultation with the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Migration.

Consultations with businesses are conducted throughout the year, whether organized by the GFMD meetings or piggybacking on regular IOE meetings.

During the 10th GFMD in Berlin in 2017, the Business Mechanism consisted of an internal business meeting that was held in parallel to the Common Space; private sector inputs to the Common Space; and business representatives participating in select sessions/panels of the government meeting. Financially, the Business Mechanism has benefited from the support of the EU, Switzerland, the Bertelsmann foundation, the IOE as well as Coca-Cola and the international law firm Fragomen.

Conceiving a Mayors Mechanism for the GFMD

An important lesson that can be drawn from reviewing the existing modalities for stakeholder engagement in the GFMD is that, transforming the Mayoral Forum into a GFMD Mayors Mechanism would mean buttressing the annual convenings of mayors and local officials through continuous engagement in between, whereby the GFMD summit meetings constitute one part of an ongoing process. What would be required to realize this vision is a strong “backbone organization” similar to the role of ICMC for the CSD working in partnership with others.

What functions will a Mayors Mechanism of the GFMD ideally deliver for local governments?

- 1) An opportunity for peer-to-peer learning, networking, and exchange of practices.
- 2) A platform to interact with States and opportunity to find solutions to shared problems.
- 3) A forum to interact with civil society and business to explore shared interests and opportunities for collaboration, including engagement in CSDs and the Business Mechanism.
- 4) A platform to review the implementation of the GCM at the local level, to have that review included in the GFMD’s report to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF)⁶, and to support development of policy frameworks for cities’ implementation of the GCM.
- 5) A chance to join and build operational alliances and partnerships, including identifying and incubating partnerships between cities, between cities and national governments, and between cities and the private sector.
- 6) A repository of tools, methodologies and good practices on migration and development, and support for adapting those tools and good practices to and applying them in particular local circumstances.
- 7) An ongoing supporting function to advance progress during the interim periods between the annual Mayoral Fora, including outreach and engagement of new cities.

The Mayors’ Mechanism could be envisaged as a four-part engagement:

- 1) An annual global convening of local authorities (the Mayoral Forum), allowing them to deliberate among themselves, could take place in parallel to the CSD. It could potentially

⁶ As invited by paragraphs 50-51 of the GCM.

include dedicated sessions for an exchange with civil society and business. The Mayoral Forum would address the same thematic areas discussed in Government Days and the Common Space and include review and follow-up of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other relevant agendas at the local level.

- 2) Mayors would present the outcomes of their deliberations and their recommendations to all GFMD stakeholders during the Common Space.
- 3) Given their role as part of the executive branch of government and critical implementation partners, they would also be invited to join at least some parts of the Government Days of the GFMD, including the Platform for Partnerships. Another logical entry point for the inclusion of local governance perspectives would be the GFMD's recurring roundtables on the topic of policy coherence.
- 4) In between GFMD Summits, local governments – through their representatives and supported by the proposed secretariat – would continue to collaborate, reach out to additional local authorities, and seek partnerships and cross fertilization with the Civil Society Days and Business Mechanism. They should also have a standing invitation to join the Friends of the Forum sessions.

A Mayors Mechanism will need a support structure that can act as an interface and advocate for municipal governments in the GFMD process and deliver the conceptual and operational tasks involved in organizing global convenings. Absent a larger restructuring and consolidation of the Secretariat function for the GFMD as-a-whole, an optimal Mayors Mechanism would be led by a secretariat that can bridge the international and the local, formed by a leading UN agency and a global city organization working together. The structure and functions of such a joint secretariat are detailed in the accompanying 13 July 2018 draft note [“Operationalizing a Mayors Mechanism in the Global Forum on Migration and Development”](#).

IV. CONSULTATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This proposal will be submitted by the GFMD Co-Chairs to the Steering Group and Friends of the Forum at the 3 September 2018 Preparatory Meeting for consideration. Discussions with the GFMD 2018 Chair and Co-Chair will be ongoing and framed by the draft concept note for the [5th Mayoral Forum on Migration, Mobility and Development](#), which calls for a multi-level approach to migration governance and the need to share and discuss good practices on vertical coordination and policy coherence for enhanced development impact. The proposal will be refined throughout the preparatory processes for the GFMD and the Mayoral Forum, scheduled to take place on 8 December 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco immediately following the GFMD and preceding the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the GCM.