

Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat

Leveraging migrants' contribution to the emergency and protecting the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis

**Speech by the UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Thursday 16 April 2020**

City Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Emilia, dear António,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning, good afternoon or good evening to all of you!

Cities are engines of growth

Cities are major destinations for migrants. Here they hope to find increased livelihood opportunities, safety and access to basic and urban services. They contribute to our national and urban economies.

Migrants work formally or informally in all sectors. Cities benefit from an increased labor force on construction sites, in trade, tourism, in food production and processing and in the hospitality sector.

Legal migrants work as doctors, nurses and in other jobs that keep health care today running. Their contributions become more acknowledged now. If they opt or need to return to their places of origin, we become more aware of their often-crucial roles in our communities and economy.

Migrants are source of labour and employment

But migrants are also the first to lose their jobs. Migrants – and especially recently and forcibly displaced people – are among the most vulnerable of our societies. Our previous learning sessions on adequate housing and safe mobility recognized our concerns for migrants, refugees and IDPs.

UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Flagship Programme

These concerns are central to our mission. UN-Habitat's newest Strategic Plan and one of our new Flagship Programme recognize the challenges and benefits of migration.

In Abu Dhabi, at WUF10, we launched our Flagship Programme on Inclusive Cities: Enhancing the Positive Impact of Urban Migration.

UN-Habitat collaborates with UCLG and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in the Mediterranean City to City Migration Project, which is now, which started in 2015 and is now in its second phase. The project works towards improving migration governance at the city level, including in urban planning processes.



We also engage with IOM and UNHCR, in the joint project “CITIES OF SOLIDARITY”, in four Latin American Cities. This joint project supports local authorities to endeavor inclusive urban societies and ensure that the economic, social and cultural contributions of all matter, also of refugees and migrants. Our collaboration with IOM is strong on global, regional and country levels. UN-Habitat also actively contributes to the UN Migration Network.

We work with national and local authorities, and through UNHCR where so necessary, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon and Somalia, to ensure that both migrant and host communities benefit from actions taken on the ground.

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Impact of COVID-19 on migrants

Faced with the Covid-19 pandemic, many local authorities across the world have already become cities of solidarity. They reacted very fast and with innovative initiatives in support of migrants and displaced communities. Many actions fast-tracked access to basic services. Cities were quick in offering additional social services to support for children of migrant communities.

Cities were first in line to produce information on the COVID-19 in different languages. They enhanced the dialogue with vulnerable people in both host and migrant communities. They acted against rumors and fake news blaming specific populations groups.

We are also seeing that migrant communities also actively contribute to joint efforts on the ground, with local authorities and civil society organizations. UN-Habitat is actively working in in Kenya, Somalia, Syria and Iraq to support migrants with various stakeholders.

Ways-forward

Together we can achieve more. With cities and local governments, we must now use the opportunity to change the narrative on migrants. While acknowledging their vulnerabilities on the one hand, we must make sure that stereotypes and xenophobia are not encouraged during this crisis. Share stories on the positive contributions of migrants in our cities. Foster inclusive communities. Increase social cohesion between migrant and host communities.

We talk about whole-of-community, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches in **planning** and action during this crisis and Beyond the Outbreak. We need to start right now. We need to ensure that inclusion reaches informal settlements, underserved urban areas, camps and camp-like environments and omits segregation by legal status.

Urban migrants, refugees and IDP communities, as well as vulnerable host populations need to **be included in response and recovery plans**. They have an immense capacity to self-organize, identify their needs and tailor innovative low-cost solutions.



We need to stay at home to stop the spread of Covid-19. That is what we do today. However, we **need solidarity if we want to rebuild prosperity**. We also need to do this today. We cannot defer that to tomorrow. We need to leverage our solidarity with migrants and their contributions if we want to succeed. With UCLG and with IOM, we are ready to listen to you, to be inspired by you and to support you.

Thanks very much to all of you.

