

Foreword: Time for cities to take centre stage on forced migration

Marvin Rees

As Mayor of Bristol (a City of Sanctuary in the UK), I am glad to see this issue of FMR exploring the pivotal role of cities and towns in welcoming and protecting displaced people.

The turn of a decade is always a good opportunity to take a step back and assess some of the deeper trends driving our ever-shortening news cycles. As we look back over the last ten years, surely one of the most noticeable features is the growing inability of national governments to deal with the most pressing issues of our time. From climate change to the regulation of social media and new technologies, solutions at the national level seem less likely than ever to meet the challenges we are facing. Nowhere is this more obvious than on the issue of forced migration, where national governments are failing at every stage of the process – in dealing with the push factors that cause people to have to flee, in supporting those people en route and in providing safe destinations that offer welcome and dignity. Yet as we look ahead to a new decade, I believe that hope can be found in the growing power and influence of cities to shape a more just and humanely ordered world.

Cities are already on the frontline of receiving and integrating those forced to flee their homes. Although there is an unhelpful lack of reliable statistics in this area, it is generally acknowledged that the majority of the world's refugee population are now in urban areas, and cities are also playing an increasing role in accommodating people displaced within their own countries. This mirrors the wider trend of growth in worldwide urban populations, which is predicted to reach 6.3 billion by 2050. In Bristol, in the UK, we are proud to be a City of Sanctuary, and the inclusion of all newcomers is a key principle of our policymaking. We see refugees as assets to our city, and seek to support them not just for their benefit but also so they can contribute to the flourishing of all Bristolians. This

outlook is shaped by the reality of our global population. Bristolians – new and old – have family members in cities across the world, and that gives us a stake in the situations facing those cities and their nations.

We know that we are far from the only city seeking to take this approach. From Amman to Kampala and São Paulo to Jakarta, cities and city leaders are finding new ways to make the inclusion of refugees a reality. Their efforts deserve praise but also close examination, so that we can learn from what works and seek ways to replicate good practice.

But if progress in the next decade is limited to city-level innovation and sharing, then I believe we will have missed a huge opportunity. Alongside this work, we also need concerted efforts to increase the profile and influence of cities in the global mechanisms that govern and enable human mobility.

Cities as equal partners

The good news is that such efforts have already begun. During the negotiations on the Global Compacts for Migration and on Refugees, I had the privilege of working with a number of cities to collectively seek to influence these critical agreements. This resulted in the Marrakech Mayors Declaration, 'Cities working together for migrants and refugees',¹ which was presented at the Intergovernmental Conference to adopt the Global Compact for Migration, as well as at the UN General Assembly meeting which adopted the Global Compact on Refugees. It sets out the commitments of cities and also calls for them to play a meaningful role in the implementation and evaluation of the Compacts.

The work of following up these efforts is now being driven by the Mayors Migration

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Council, a new initiative to support cities to become more influential at the global level. I am proud to sit on the Leadership Board of the Council alongside mayors from across the globe, and together we are determined to make progress on expanding the role for cities.² The recent appointment of the Mayors Migration Council to the Steering Committee of the UN Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund is a sign that these efforts are beginning to bear fruit. But of course there is so much further to go, and many hurdles to overcome if we are to see global governance move into a new iteration with cities and networks of cities sitting alongside national governments as equal partners.

That's why I believe this edition of Forced Migration Review is so timely. It reveals the breadth of urban contexts, showcasing the ways that cities in every part of the world are seeking to play their part in the inclusion of newcomers. It also highlights the complexity of these contexts, revealing both the opportunities and the challenges of working at the city level. But above all it powerfully makes the case for cities as indispensable stakeholders in the governance of human mobility. As we enter this new decade full of possibilities and challenges, there is a role for us all in ensuring that cities live up to their potential and help make the world a safer, fairer and kinder place for those forced to move.

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1. bit.ly/Marrakech-Mayors-Declaration

2. Other Leadership Board members are from Montréal, Los Angeles, São Paulo, Zürich, Milan, Freetown, Kampala, Amman and Athens.



Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol (second from right), at the first Leadership Board meeting of the Mayors Migration Council, New York, July 2019.



The **Mayors Migration Council (MMC)** is a global initiative led by the mayors of Amman, Bristol, Freetown, Kampala, Los Angeles, Milan, Montréal, São Paulo and Zürich, and the former mayor of Athens. Its mission is to ensure that global responses to migration and refugee issues are relevant to the realities experienced in cities and enable local-level policy solutions.

MMC's team provides strategic advice and support to mayors and local government officials looking to a) institutionalise city-level participation in national and international policy making processes, b) build their diplomatic and advocacy capacity and c) unlock and direct humanitarian and development resources towards cities. An important principle throughout MMC's work is to amplify the voices of Global South and secondary cities, which are often under-represented despite having the most relevant experiences to share.

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