



The Hague Process  
on Refugees and Migration



Istanbul, Turkey, 2006 © Gerhard Van Roon

## BIG CITIES AND MIGRATION

INTERNATIONAL WORKING CONFERENCE  
January 31<sup>st</sup> – February 1<sup>st</sup> 2007  
The Hague, The Netherlands

## FINAL REPORT



## CONTENT OF THE REPORT

- Conference Overview and Follow-Up Steps..... page 2
- Executive Summary .....page 3
- Main Findings and Policy Directions by Theme.....page 4-8



## CONFERENCE OVERVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP STEPS

### BACKGROUND

The International Working Conference was organized by *The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration* (THP Foundation), under its *Big Cities Initiative* and in close cooperation with the City of The Hague, the Netherlands.

In 2005 and 2006, a series of pre-conferences were organized to pave the way for this high-level meeting (online reports are available on the THP website [www.thehagueprocess.org](http://www.thehagueprocess.org)):

- *The Voice of the Diaspora, Refugees and Migrant communities* (November 2005)
- *The Changing Impact of Human Mobility on Rural Areas and Cities* (September 2006)
- *Education, Immigration and Integration* (November 2006)

The project received support from the Compagnia di San Paolo, ICCO, Oxfam Novib and the NCDO.

### ATTENDANCE

- Mayors, Vice and Deputy Mayors, elected officials and administrative officers with responsibilities in integration, employment, housing, education, health, equality policy and urban planning. Officially represented were the cities of Amman (Jordan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Istanbul (Turkey), Johannesburg (South Africa), Lagos (Nigeria), Lyon (France), Paris (France), Stockholm (Sweden), The Hague (Netherlands), Torino (Italy), Utrecht (Netherlands).
- Internationally selected representatives of refugees and migrants' organizations from the THP network, international and national organizations, academia, faith-groups, business, education and health experts, students of international affairs.
- Opening words by HRH Prince Constantijn of The Netherlands, Chairman of the Board of THP, and William J. Deetman, Mayor of The Hague and Secretary of the Board of THP, followed by addresses by: Mrs. Saskia Sassen Ralph Lewis Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, and Centennial Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics; Mrs. Régine Declercq, Belgian Ambassador for Asylum and Immigration and Coordinator of the forthcoming *Global Forum on International Migration and Development*; Mayor A.B.M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury of Chittagong, Bangladesh.

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

- Two days of workshops and interactive exchanges of ideas in the field of migration and local policies to enhance social cohesion, inclusion and participation of refugee and migrant populations at the city level. Notwithstanding discrepancies in resources and level of development of cities worldwide, discussions looked to emphasize principles valid for all cities and all societies.
- Sharing of visions, local challenges and practices in focused working sessions on: (1) Social Cohesion; (2) Local Governance and Political Participation; (3) Education; (4) Housing, Health and other Social Services; (5) Migrant Enterprise, Employment and Business Opportunities.
- Acquiring input for upcoming international and intergovernmental meetings including the UN Global Forum on International Migration and Development (Brussels, July 2007), the UN-Habitat Conference (October 2007) and UCLG Conference (2008).

### FOLLOW-UP STEPS

- A worldwide consultation and feedback from selected city governments on the most innovative principles identified during the International Working Conference. City governments having expressed high interest for the initiative include: Antwerp, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Birmingham, Bogota, Budapest, Copenhagen, Lille, Los Angeles, Marseille, Mexico City, New Delhi, Oslo, Quezon City, Rabat, Rome, Rotterdam, Stuttgart, Toronto, Vancouver (list to be updated in due course).
- A bold and widely consulted THP policy document will be disseminated to all relevant actors in the field and to the forthcoming major international forums, including the *Global Forum on International Migration and Development* (Brussels, July 2007).
- Further activities will continue to bring local authorities together with businesses, refugee and migrant organizations and all stakeholders to build alliances and advance the agenda.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### GENERAL POINTS

- **Social inclusion of newcomers** is of the utmost importance for the future of cities. Cities now host more than half of the world's population. As local and national demographics continue to undergo rapid change, sustainable policies will increasingly require a shift towards looking at opportunities and challenges from a collective perspective rather than isolating populations and focusing on the concern of national citizens.
- **The specific role of city governments** derives from their being ultimately responsible for the successful social cohesion and inclusion of all at the local level. Cities are "social ladders" and crucial agents for change, with legitimate and central positions to set and advance the agenda and proactively engage and support inclusive policies and programs.
- **Cities' unique assets and experiences** should be widely shared and influence national and international migration and integration policies accordingly. The international agenda remains by and large shaped by national governments, and resources allocated to cities do not level up to the responses they are required to provide. To strengthen their voice, cities should not limit their activities to common declarations and advocacy but look to assert themselves as reliable and enduring partners in a structured international dialogue.

### INNOVATIVE AND KEY FINDINGS

- Numerous cities call for a paradigm change with a pragmatic shift from a nationality-based to a more inclusive **residency-based approach to citizenship**. Refugees, migrants and other city residents have concerns and expectations which significantly match and overlap on policy matters such as security, health, housing, education and employment. Sustainable approaches entail greater emphasis on common concerns and joint interests rather than differentiating migrants and refugees by artificially assigned identities and assumed concerns.
- **Political participation** remains a prominent and pressing aspect of the overall agenda. Beyond the debate on local voting rights, cities can and must find innovative ways to provide refugees and migrants with a voice and effective influence in local policymaking. In urban centers, citizenship should not only be conceived within the framework of the legal system, but as a social reality. Migrants and refugees, regardless of their status, are part of the city's population and should on that basis be included in public discussion and decision-making processes.
- Efforts should focus on equal and effective **access to employment opportunities** as a pivotal component and drive newcomers' participation in host societies. Unemployment generates economic insecurity and should be more largely regarded as a fundamental obstacle to social inclusion. Based on realistic assessments of the specific barriers and disadvantages faced by migrants and refugees, issues to be addressed include the following: facilitation and support of individual enterprise; adequate assessment and recognition of skills; sound anti-discrimination policies and monitoring in all spheres; access to vocational training and language acquisition.
- Investing in **education** will remain instrumental in fostering shared values and a sense of belonging, informed citizenship and individual and mutual responsibility. Points for specific emphasis and action include: pre-schooling, non-discriminatory access to all levels of educational systems, systematic and open language support programs, comprehensive information, advice and orientation on school systems and curriculums, increased cultural sensitivity in curriculums and school environments, and lifelong-learning opportunities.
- The empowerment and well-being of newcomers will continue to depend on both legal and practical availability and accessibility of a range of social services (including transportation, housing and health). **Common standards, for all residents**, should stand as a permanent and priority objective for public policies. While specific measures may be required, inclusive and non-targeted measures are most likely to further social cohesion, shared benefits and sense of belonging, and prevent unwanted effects of further stigmatization, tensions and polarization. The notion of **empowerment**, equally valuable for all residents, is a drive for policy coherence in all fields and holistic responses (access to the labor market, social services, civic and political institutions).
- International human rights benchmarks need to find coherence in understanding and implementation (i.e through education and training of disempowered and vulnerable populations, policymakers and other stakeholders). The **human rights based approach** provides a useful framework both for inclusive city policies – notably for undocumented residents - and for cities' advocacy on national and international policy levels.



*By excluding people from the economic, the social and the political life in our cities, we as a society are not only failing them, we are also failing ourselves. If we don't have the courage to embark on new paths, we will be abandoning unique opportunities.*  
W. Deetman, Mayor of The Hague

#### GENERAL FINDINGS

- Numerous cities called for a paradigm change with a pragmatic shift from a nationality-based to a more inclusive residency-based approach to citizenship. Refugees, migrants and other city residents have concerns and expectations which significantly match and overlap and would be advantageously emphasized (while the first may face a number of specific barriers and challenges which need to be acknowledged and addressed). New light needs to be shed on the collective benefits and opportunities which align with the solutions to foster greater participation of migrants and refugees locally.
- Inclusive and non-targeted policies are most likely to further social cohesion, shared benefits and sense of belonging, and prevent unwanted effects of further stigmatization, tensions and polarization in increasingly diverse cities. Equal opportunity and upward mobility are essential to advancing social cohesion.
- Diversity brings countless opportunities. Large cities are genuinely places of diversity, a diversity which almost invariably accounts for their past and present dynamism and offers the best prospects and chances for future development. Unbalanced and prejudiced public perceptions and terminology with regards to migrants and refugees need to be tackled. In turn, commonality and the contribution of newcomers as residents of a larger community can be proactively acknowledged and brought into public knowledge. While public actors and the media have a pivotal role in fostering change, shifts in public opinion will remain dependent on individual awareness and responsibility.
- Social cohesion ultimately also depends on cultural challenges and potential conflicts being openly addressed both by newcomers and receiving societies. It requires open dialogue, shared responsibility and mutual adaptation throughout a two-sided process, giving each resident a place and opportunity to live the life aspired to in accordance with the fundamental values of the host society.

#### POLICY DIRECTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Points for specific emphasis and action include:

##### ▶ Community development approaches

Local public/private agencies developing projects to transform neighborhoods and improve quality of life for all residents through a holistic approach in Torino, Italy (i.e. Porta Palazzo)

##### ▶ Bottom-up open support measures

Field initiatives initiated by civil society actors and individual citizens often prove more sustainable than top-down governmental initiatives. Support measures to empower refugees and migrants which emphasize joint interests, create new solidarities and common benefits are of specific value. Examples include:

- Pairing up of newcomers with local resident as volunteer coaches (Netherlands)
- Safe neighborhoods and schools initiatives
- Language courses in the mother tongue of immigrant students, accessible to all students (Sweden, Canada)

##### ▶ Anti-discrimination policies

Sound and proactive approaches in the field include:

- Training and awareness-building programs for civil servants in Lyon, France (*Mission Egalité*)
- Mainstreaming in all local policies in Lyon, France (*Mission Egalité*)
- Local monitoring agencies and "testing"

##### ▶ Mediation and inter-cultural dialogue

Measures need to be equally directed at newcomers, public structures and institutions:

- Training on inter-cultural competences in the public and private sectors
- Introduction of programs emphasizing shared responsibilities
- Cultural events and exchange programs

## LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



### GENERAL FINDINGS

- Cities across the world operate with different legislative frameworks and their capacity and space for initiatives vary accordingly. Beyond the diversity of experiences, the common vision of an inclusive local political life warrants further exchanges for cities to discuss their policy and advocacy undertakings.
- Granting migrants and refugees local voting rights and political rights conditions effective participation and remains on the horizon line of many cities' advocacy. While cities may find it difficult to inform national legislations accordingly, a number of policy alternatives or complementary measures are available for them to enhance the political participation of migrants and refugees within the city community.
- Consultative bodies and procedures as well as exemplary recruitment policies in the public sector can be set up and designed to encourage local governments to be more representative and responsive. Of key importance is that new consultative structures and official positions are integrated in the various local channels of deliberation and decision-making. Sufficient (human) resources are required for such structures to operate efficiently and strengthen information flows and dialogue between residents and local policy makers.
- The role of the media, informal relations and personal contacts should not be downplayed. Continuous and direct dialogue as well as informal relationships between city authorities, refugee and migrant populations can significantly strengthen actual participation.

### POLICY DIRECTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Points for specific emphasis and examples include:

- ▶ Consultative bodies and processes
  - Neighborhood councils, GIPIV (advisory body on city integration) and Council of Foreign Residents of Lyon (*Conseil des Résidents Etrangers Lyonnais* -CREL) in Lyon, France
  - Council for Citizenship of non- EU residents of Paris (*Conseil de la Citoyenneté des Parisiens Non Communautaires* - CCPNC) in Paris, France
  - "Double system" of representation in Dutch cities, coupling local voting rights with consultative bodies
- ▶ Relationship building, direct dialogue and consultation
  - Local consultation and dialogue between elected official and community and organization leaders in Johannesburg, South Africa ("Roadshows")
- ▶ Local civic education programs and awareness-building
  - Promotion of education programs on political rights and access to public services
  - Provision of comprehensive information on the host country's national and local political system through multilingual guides and tours
  - General awareness campaign to prevent adverse reactions from local populations and stress the value of newcomers' participation in the development of joint solutions and sustainable policies
- ▶ International advocacy and knowledge sharing on local voting rights
- ▶ Additional and complementary measures (depending on legal opportunities)
  - Temporary quotas in public and private recruitment policies, (on the condition that qualification remains the first criteria)
  - Quotas in political parties and election lists

## EDUCATION



### GENERAL FINDINGS

- Education fosters inclusion, shared values, sense of belonging, informed citizenship, individual and mutual responsibility. Cities have a critical role in the area of education and school environment, where most expectations are shared by all residents.
- Universal access to the educational system needs to include all children, regardless of their background, administrative and legal status (and that of their parents). Opportunities for life-long-learning can often be further developed and facilitate adults' inclusion and insertion into the labor market. Traditional gender patterns and cultural practices can be significant obstacles to female's access to higher education and vocational training and may ultimately impede their self-empowerment. These situations need to be confronted through public awareness and action.
- Successful school systems exist and usually share the following characteristics: universal standards and high ambitions for students; comprehensive support programs (including language) with adequate resources; emphasis on integrated and individualized pathways. While responsibilities in the field are often largely shared with other levels of governments, cities have a number of options available to create inclusive schools and build on the motivations and aspirations of immigrant students and their positive attitudes towards school and learning. Efficient approaches combine individual (e.g support, counseling, tracking) and global measures (e.g school environment and curriculums).
- Schools are engines of mutual understanding and socialization. Formal and informal education can be further linked and school environments developed to ensure and favor the children's wellness and foster open-mindedness. Such processes requires involvement and coordination from all actors (students, educational staff, parents, civil society representatives, and policymakers) and a wide approach encompassing educational, social, medical, cultural and recreational dimensions. All actors can play a decisive role in stimulating tolerance and respect and contributing to building the schools of tomorrow.
- Notwithstanding disparities in development, cities worldwide share an identical need for effective advocacy and enforcement of basic human rights with regards to education. Basic entitlements of children are being continuously challenged either by the lack of infrastructures or lack of individual and collective resources. Children of undocumented newcomers are especially limited by restrictive immigration policies and regulations, as evidenced recently in a number of European countries.

### POLICY DIRECTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Points for specific emphasis and action include:

- ▶ Preschools that help all children enter the school system on a more equal footing
- ▶ Access and Information
  - Provision of comprehensive information and advice on education paths, schools and curriculums for parents' of immigrant students to gain decision-making capacity
- ▶ School environment
  - Initiatives to strengthen relations and dialogue between parents and educational staff, for instance through inclusion in school boards
  - Tutorial systems between younger and older children as role models
- ▶ Cultural sensitivity
  - Evaluation and revision of curriculums, tests' content and requirements to address and minimize cultural bias
  - Diversity policy in recruitment of educational staff
  - Exchange programs between classes, neighborhood schools, teachers and school staff
  - Courses to stimulate students' awareness and curiosity for cultural diversity, past and contemporary migration dynamics and issues of refugee protection
  - Tools and training to assess and recognize previous educational accomplishments and diplomas

## ACCESS TO HOUSING, HEALTH AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES



### GENERAL FINDINGS

- There are various challenges to overcome in providing the wide range of social services needed by migrants and refugee populations. Resources accessible in cities worldwide differ significantly, depending on the local context and level of development. These distinct realities have to be kept in mind when comparing experiences and sharing concrete actions.
- The question of adequate and sustainable services necessarily precedes that of securing equal and effective access for refugee and migrant populations. Both the legal and practical accessibility of a range of social services need to be guaranteed (including transportation, housing and health). Beyond access, the challenge is to ensure undifferentiated and high-level provisions for all residents. The human rights based approach provides a useful framework and basis to develop and advocate for inclusive city policies, notably for the most vulnerable residents - including undocumented.
- Restrictive national legislation often results in growing numbers of undocumented residents being cut off from basic entitlements. Inclusive public policies are often further limited in their scope and efficiency by the lack of available information on the number and actual situation of such populations. Responses will depend on a constructive dialogue between all levels of governments. It also implies cities should be equipped with required monitoring capacities and through developing initiatives to increase newcomers' trust towards public services.
  - Support is needed for projects which favor mixed neighborhoods, socially and culturally, with emphasis on housing programs and urban renewal. Cultural segregation can be effectively addressed with open and supportive housing policies, more social housing provisions and less discriminative practices in private housing.
  - There are compelling economic and social arguments for including refugees and migrants in access to equitable public health and sanitation facilities. Extensive evidence shows that primary health care, clean water sanitation and living conditions are highly cost effective in promoting good health and economic productivity of the entire population.
  - Cooperation with the private sector needs further exploration to balance limited public resources and improve efficiency in project funding and execution. New forms of public-private partnerships can be initiated by city governments (i.e. in the construction, housing or health sectors).

### POLICY DIRECTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Points for specific emphasis and action include:

- ▶ Access to social services
  - Information guidance through multi-language help-lines and call centers and translation services
  - Financial support for migrants' community based integrated services where trust-conducive environments are available (familiar and culturally sensitive)
  - Appointment of cultural mediators and ombudsmen
  - Monitoring and evaluation of actual barriers preventing access to public services
- ▶ Health
  - Multilingual information and education campaigns at schools
  - Training of health practitioners on specific problems regularly occurring in particular communities
  - Establishment of health care emergency funds for migrants and refugees with special needs
- ▶ Housing
  - Local implementation of "rental subsidy" system set by the central government to ensure access to decent housing (Netherlands)
  - Commissions to react to the shortage of social housing and allocate social housing on a non-discriminatory basis and according to transparent criteria (against evidence of unfair priorities/ personal networking)
  - Required diversity benchmarks for new housing programs
  - Monitoring and enforcement of security/public health requirements in housing to address abuse of undocumented and vulnerable residents. Tripartite consultation between land owners, local governments and dwellers (Lagos, Nigeria)
  - Pooling of resources and strategies among neighboring municipalities.
  - Partnerships with the private sector as alternatives to public budget limitations in Amman, Jordan and Lagos, Nigeria (Lagos Infrastructure Project, "Build, Own and Operate/ Transfer" projects)



### GENERAL FINDINGS

- Unemployment generates economic insecurity and should largely be regarded as a fundamental obstacle to social inclusion. Efforts should focus on equal and effective access to employment opportunities. Realistic assessment of the specific barriers and disadvantages faced by migrants and refugees is therefore a prerequisite.
- A holistic approach is required to create an enabling environment and equal opportunities for migrants and refugees. Components of a coherent strategy and action plan include: facilitation and support to individual enterprise; recognition and assessment of skills; anti-discrimination policies and laws enforcement in recruitment and employment; access to vocational training and language acquisition.
- In a number of cities, the informal sector absorbs a great share of the migrant workforce, leaving migrants highly vulnerable to exploitation, dangerous working conditions and systematic abuse. Cities should be mandated and equipped to identify entities of illegal hiring and bring all stakeholders to face their responsibilities. Relevant data and information could and should be used to both influence national policies on the situation of illegally employed migrants and required responses to ensure their protection.
- Municipalities can develop a new and more inclusive culture with regard to small migrant businesses and liberalize their rules of licensing and regulations. Incentives can be given to startups through capacity building exercises, tax breaks or business financing.

### POLICY DIRECTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

- ▶ Access to employment
  - Job related language training programs (for example Stockholm)
  - Exemplary practices of cities in public contracting with business partners and service providers.
  - Hiring quotas of migrant workers especially within the local government/ administrations (if legally authorized and publicly supported)
  - Partly subsidized jobs (national policy in the Netherlands)
- ▶ Information structures
  - "Resource center/desk" as information hub and facility, advising on taxes and administrative, business opportunities and connecting job-seekers with employers
  - "Business incubators" for skills development and capacity-building
  - Local chambers of commerce and activities to promote cooperation amongst small businesses to exchange good practices and build up networks
  - Structures to facilitate insertion of migrants' businesses into the broader market
  - Intermediate structures and networks to facilitate banking and credit operations and access to financial capital
- ▶ Enabling environment and incentives
  - Simplified license systems, administrative and language requirements for start-ups and for aspiring entrepreneurs
  - Tax policies to accommodate and include workers and businesses in informal sectors
  - Targeted tax deductions to encourage hiring of low-skilled domestic workers, curb illegal employment and further their protection
  - Focused studies of migrants' working conditions in specific sectors (construction, care-giving, domestic services, street vending) to warrant potential regularization-schemes as well as concrete actions to counter exploitation
- ▶ Protection and advocacy
  - Study and dissemination of information on migrant businesses and their importance for the city's economy and dynamism
  - Joint campaigns for the protection of migrant workers and national enforcement of the international human rights framework and provisions (notably the UN Convention on the protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families)
  - Cooperation with trade unions to improve the conditions of precariously employed people including 'day' and temporary workers
  - Ratification and concrete follow-up of available charters, including the Saint-Denis *European Charter for Safeguarding Human Rights in Cities*

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