Local governments are uniquely placed to protect the rights of migrant and displaced children. It is where children live, play and learn that their lives are most immediately affected. While asylum or family reunification procedures, detention practices or return processes are defined and implemented at the national level, municipalities are often responsible for meeting the immediate needs of children and families, including reception, safety, housing, education and healthcare. The protection and successful integration of migrant and displaced children therefore depends on local leadership and municipal actions. The momentum around the Global Compacts provides a critical opportunity to transfer successful models, share lessons learned, and improve city responses, to help local governments accelerate efforts to make migration work for all – including the most vulnerable children.

CONTEXT

Around the world tens of millions of children are on the move – 28 million of them driven from their homes by conflict and insecurity, and millions more migrating in the hope of finding a better life. Increasing numbers of children are moving either internally or across borders, either alone or with their families, to cities and other urban areas. Consequently, the most vulnerable children are increasingly found in urban settings – and migrant, refugee and internally displaced children continue to be among the most marginalized. Their vulnerabilities arise from an interplay of factors – because they are children and have left home, circumstances they face on route, as well as conditions upon arrival.

Local governments have an in-depth understanding of the concrete challenges and opportunities these children face, often putting in place innovative solutions to reduce and address their vulnerabilities. Mayors around the world are coming up with creative ways to make their cities and communities more inclusive, experimenting with new approaches and piloting public-private and other partnerships. Further, the influence of local governments goes far beyond the limits of their municipalities. Local actors are not only rightfully demanding their seat at the table in international discussions on migration, but also playing a critical role in shaping a more positive narrative on migration, through incubating solutions and generating evidence on ‘what works’ for children, families, communities and cities.

The recommendations below are an illustration of concrete actions that local actors can take – and are already taking – across different geographies, political and economic contexts, to reduce and address the vulnerabilities of migrant and displaced children.
RECOMMENDATIONS

**Protect children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation**

Invest in and train social workers, police, lawyers and teachers in child rights and protection, to equip them to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, including trafficking.

*Siliguri in India* tackles child labour and trafficking through empowering community stakeholders in six target slum areas through supporting and providing training to child protection actors, school teachers, social workers and local leaders as well as local police and border patrol officers.

Create **one-stop shops** where children and families can receive information, counseling and assistance at the same time.

Reception centres in *Norwegian municipalities* provide supervision, counselling and support for children, as well as access to education, language or training courses, and health care.

**End the immigration detention of children**

Create and advocate for **alternatives to detention** for all migrant and displaced children in the city, including those traveling with their families.

*The Mexican municipality of Villahermosa* has created an ‘open-door’ longer-term shelter for migrant children and asylum seekers as an alternative to detention. Children receive psychosocial support, have access to education, health services, legal information and assistance.

Appoint, train and monitor **qualified guardians** for unaccompanied and separated children to prevent child detention.

*Palermo* strengthens the role of volunteer guardians to protect and promote social inclusion of unaccompanied children. A guardian monitoring and support office assists volunteer guardians to complete legal paperwork, including international protection applications, and make referrals of vulnerable children to the right services. The Office also aims to mobilize the host community to promote alternative care mechanisms (particularly foster care) and social inclusion opportunities for children.

**Give children legal status**

Facilitate children’s access to **official registration as city residents**, regardless of their status – including through municipal ID cards.

*New York* provides municipal IDs regardless of status. IDNYC is a free government-issued photo ID card that secures access to services and cultural institutions to every city resident, including disadvantaged communities, including youth and undocumented migrants. Personal information collected from IDNYC applicants is not shared with immigration authorities.

**Keep families together**

**Accompany and support** migrant and displaced children through the family reunification process.

*Barcelona* supports families applying for family reunification through the New Families in Barcelona program, which provides orientation and support to families before, during and after the process of family reunification. In the absence of a national-level program, the city uses its local budget to offer refugee and migrant families comprehensive and personalized guidance on the legal, practical and psychological aspects of the family reunification process.
**Keep every migrant and displaced child learning and give them access to health and other quality services**

Establish firewalls between local service providers and immigration authorities, so undocumented families are not discouraged from using services for fear of being detected. **Remove identification requirements** that restrict access to services.

*Seoul, Geneva and Munich* have established ‘firewalls’ that keep information from being shared between social services and immigration authorities. By promising confidentiality and security, these ‘firewalls’ allow children access to social services without fear.

**Address the underlying causes that uproot children from their homes**

In departure cities: **invest in mobile outreach programmes to identify and support children at risk**, including children left behind, to help prevent unsafe migration.

*In Honduras, the municipalities of San Pedro Sula, Catacamas and Choloma* are supporting the emotional recovery of returned migrant children and other children at risk, through providing care, psychosocial support and referral to a psychologist when required.

In arrival cities: **create partnerships with other cities along migration routes** to strengthen transnational protection responses, information sharing and learning from good practices.

*The Hague and Almere* support Lebanese and Jordanian municipalities hosting refugees - they focus on municipal services (waste, water, sewage), local economic development, strategic planning, and cooperation across cities.

**Promote measures to combat xenophobia and marginalization and support inclusion**

End legal and policy discrimination based on migration, asylum, nationality or residence status, as well as all practices that criminalize undocumented stay in the city.

*Los Angeles* has introduced an Executive Directive that requires equal access to city facilities, programmes and services for all residents without regard to citizenship or immigration status.

**Partner with local businesses** to support access to the labour market and entrepreneurship for young migrant and displaced people.

*Saint-Denis* has taken action to close the opportunity gap between talented immigrant youth and corporate employers through providing recruitment services and diversity training, in partnership with a recruitment agency and HR consulting non-profit.

**Ensure** existing and new **city-level child and youth initiatives are inclusive of migrants**, ranging from social and cultural events, sports activities and youth councils.

*The Child Friendly City of Postojna, Slovenia, allocates two seats for migrant and refugee children in its youth council, allowing young migrants to meaningfully contribute to decisions that impact their lives. UNICEF’s Child Friendly Cities Initiative supports local governments to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child within their local jurisdictions through practical, meaningful and measurable results for children, including refugee, migrant and internally displaced children.*