Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity

Reimagining human mobility in Africa and Europe

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Key messages

- Mayors and city administrations have a growing role in addressing global challenges and advancing international goals and regional policy agendas. As the level of government most directly accountable to their residents, they have the impetus to act and solutions to offer and are increasingly vocal on issues that directly affect local communities, including the opportunities and challenges presented by human mobility.

- The 'Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity: reimagining human mobility in Africa and Europe' was launched by the mayors of Freetown and Milan. With 20 participating cities from Africa and Europe, the Dialogue will deliver a joint vision, practical actions, and operational partnerships to make the most of the reality of human mobility and support development for urban communities across the two continents.

- As countries grapple with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – and face the prospect of further shocks, including those propelled by climate change – cities can chart a path forward by supporting and testing innovations to achieve more inclusive local governance, access to basic services for all, the transition to a green economy, and fairer, more equitable trade and mobility between Africa and Europe.

Introduction

Africa and Europe are linked by history, culture, demographic trends, trade and migration. They share a commitment to multilateralism and concern that the erosion of the rules-based international order will make it harder to address common challenges such as violent extremism, pandemics and the climate crisis. However, saddled with the legacy of a colonial past, both continents are struggling to overcome a donor-aid recipient dynamic. While the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) are seeking to create a common partnership framework, an array of bilateral and subregional agreements and relations create a patchwork of engagement that makes it difficult to come to coherent policies and positions. Since the Joint Africa-EU Strategy of 2007, the relationship has been framed as a 'partnership of equals', a rhetoric strongly endorsed by the current EU Commission (European Council, 2007). Yet, in practice, power imbalances and different levels of investment remain (Teevan and Sheriff 2019; Medinilla and Teevan 2020).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of migration. Since 2015, when the Syrian refugee crisis triggered a spike in mixed movements across the Mediterranean Sea and set off a political crisis in Europe, the topic has become increasingly contentious. Despite a plethora of summits, policy dialogues and initiatives on migration in recent years, governments in Africa and Europe struggle to find common ground on how to manage human mobility between the continents.[1] This has had a negative impact on both sides' commitment to facilitating free movement within their borders, where the majority of movements happen. Indeed, migration dynamics between Africa and Europe cannot be delinked and addressed separately from those within Africa and the EU. Migration is in large part a local-to-local,

city-to-city dynamic that most directly affects migrants, their families and the communities that they leave, transit through and join. The majority of migrants settle in cities, putting mayors and local governments at the forefront of addressing the challenges and reaping the rewards that come from human mobility. Yet too often migration management does not involve the local actors that are doing the managing on a day-to-day basis.

In recent years, cities have effectively mobilised to influence the international processes set in motion by the Syrian refugee crisis and other large movements of migrants and refugees. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (UNGA, 2016a), the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (ibid., 2018a) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (ibid. 2018b) all recognize the important role of local authorities. Cities played an active role in the deliberations on the Global Compacts and shaped important provisions, such as the GCM's call for 'non-discriminatory access' to basic services like health and education (Thouez, forthcoming). In the Marrakech Mayors Declaration (UCLG, 2018), mayors committed to advance the principles and objectives of the GCM and GCR in unison, and to work towards solidarity and cooperation amongst cities, greater coordination of services, improved data collection, sustainable partnerships, joint advocacy and shaping a better-informed narrative on migration. At the same time, a group of principled and pragmatic mayors came together to form the Mayors Migration Council (MMC) in an effort to continually secure cities' influence in and support from international fora and organisations dealing with migration and refugees.[2]

In July 2019, the Mayors of Freetown and Milan, Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr and Giuseppe Sala, met as founding members at the first Leadership Board of the MMC in New York. Over several conversations, the mayors discussed their shared interest in making their cities places of opportunity, where youth can thrive, mobility is

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1   For an analysis and recommendations specific to the German–Africa relationship, see www.bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/2019-11/Bither_Ziebarth_How_to_Upgrade_Germanys_Policy_Towards_African_Countries_on_Migration.pdf.

2   See www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org.

a choice and newcomers can find a home. They also agreed that mayors could work together to develop a vision and practical actions towards a new approach to human mobility within and between Africa and Europe.

The Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity

'The Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity: reimagining human mobility in Africa and Europe' (Mayors Dialogue) is built on the understanding that cities thrive when they attract capital and people with diverse skills and talent, while managing access to markets, public services and urban spaces in a manner that is inclusive and equitable, so that all city residents can feel like they belong.[3] It affirms the growing role that mayors and cities play in addressing global challenges and advancing international and regional policy agendas, including the Paris Agreement (UN, 2015), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNGA, 2015) and New Urban Agenda (NUA) (ibid., 2016b), as well as the AU's Agenda 2063 (AU, n.d.) and the EU's Green Deal (European Commission, n.d.). As the level of government most directly accountable to their residents, mayors and local authorities have the impetus to act and solutions to offer and are increasingly vocal on issues that directly affect their communities.

The Mayors Dialogue conceives of human mobility in broad terms and as integrally linked to urban development dynamics. It uses the term human mobility to describe all forms of temporary and permanent movements that cities experience. This includes migration to cities from within countries, regional mobility within the two continents, as well as movements between them. Human mobility includes voluntary migration as well as forced displacement, via legal pathways or through irregular channels. It also incorporates all types of mobile populations. By opting for a comprehensive definition of human mobility, the Mayors Dialogue creates space for the varied and shifting population dynamics that cities in Africa and Europe experience. It also seeks to avoid the prevailing dichotomies between refugees and migrants and regular and irregular migration that are often the preoccupation of international conversations – focusing instead on urban development challenges and solutions that African and European city leaders have in common.

The Mayors Dialogue is not the first instance of collaboration between African and European mayors. It builds on a long history of decentralised cooperation among local authorities from both continents, focused on capacity development, the promotion of decentralisation and mobilisation of resources for local development projects. The umbrella organisation Platforma supports such cooperation and lobbies the EU to strengthen the role of local and regional governments in European development policy (Smith, 2011).[4] Since 2015, the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM) facilitates peer-exchanges and networking, knowledge generation and pilot projects on urban migration governance between European, North African and Middle Eastern cities.[5] African and European mayors and cities also meet in a number of global city networks such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), C40 Cities, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, and those that reflect historic ties, such as the Association Internationale des Maires Francophones (AIMF) and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).

The Mayors Dialogue is distinct, however, in that cities are setting the agenda for intercontinental dialogue and bringing other stakeholders along. By working together and in partnership with other stakeholders,

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3   See www.odi.org/projects/16889-mayors-dialogue-on-growth-and-solidarity-reimagining-human-mobility-in-africa-and-europe.

4   See https://platforma-dev.eu.

5   See www.icmpd.org/our-work/migration-dialogues/mtm-dialogue/city-to-city-mc2cm.

including national governments, international organisations, civil society and private actors, cities can: a) reshape the realities of human mobility in and between Africa and Europe, by finding and advancing innovative and practical solutions that address the challenges and opportunities of people moving through the lens of urban development and community cohesion; and b) influence the discourse, policymaking and resource allocations of national governments and regional institutions to better reflect and respond to local realities.

The Mayors Dialogue is structured around three interconnected tracks of engagement:

1. A political track, designed to develop a shared vision and action agenda among mayors and to influence national and regional policy frameworks and resource allocations to be responsive to city realities.
2. A knowledge and policy track designed to identify, share and help scale policy and institutional innovations in and across cities.
3. A partnerships track, focused on mobilising stakeholder support for operational city-to-city collaborations.

Throughout 2020 and into 2021, the Mayors Dialogue will prepare the ground for a meeting of African and European Mayors, scheduled to take place in March 2021 in Milan, where the mayors will shape and commit to an Agenda for Action on Human Mobility and pen a letter of commitment to their own residents to ensure accountability and delivery.[6] By creating a space for informal, preparatory engagement in the lead up to the March 2021 meeting, and beyond, the Mayors Dialogue aims to foster trustful relations where challenges can be shared, diverging views and interests can be voiced, and difficult issues addressed. A more honest dialogue holds the potential to shift relations between Africa and Europe. Through in-depth engagement on common priorities and concerns, cities can not only learn from each other but also develop and implement solutions together.

Growth and solidarity: building a common agenda for action

The Mayors Dialogue seeks to lay out a joint action agenda rooted in the priorities of cities on both continents. Urban development in both contexts is guided by the universal goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which merges the quest for growth and prosperity with the commitment to respect and protect the planet and to 'leave no one behind'. For cities, this means reducing carbon emissions, waste and pollution in urban economies while promoting infrastructure development, job creation, social inclusion and participation in local decision-making for city residents, including the most vulnerable people and communities. While this vision is widely shared among policymakers today, innovation and experimentation is needed to identify the right mix of policies in each context to achieve it (Lee, 2019). Human mobility intersects with the full range of urban development challenges, from housing and public transport to jobs and social services. Managing human mobility at the city level thus involves a range of policy sectors beyond migration policy.

The growth challenge

Human mobility is a driver of development processes, just as developmental challenges – including a lack of safety and security, the absence of basic services and livelihood opportunities, environmental degradation, and denial of voice, recognition and government accountability – can influence migration decisions (e.g. UNDP, 2009; UNCTAD, 2018; UNDP, 2019; Foresti and Hagen-Zanker, 2018; Adepoju (ed.), 2020; Smart et al., 2020). Cities are magnets for migrants, and are widely seen as engines of economic growth. Urbanisation – fuelled by natural population growth in cities, as well as the movement of people – is often considered a precondition for economic development (Pieterse, 2009). Africa's cities are home to 600 million people and account for more than 50% of the region's gross domestic product (GDP) (UNECA, 2020). By 2040 half of

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6 Participating cities include Accra, Agadez, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bristol, Dakar, Durban, Freetown, Hamburg, Helsinki, Kampala, Kanifing, Kigali, Lisbon, Mannheim, Maputo, Milan, Paris, Tunis and Zürich. Other cities across Africa and Europe are joining throughout 2020.

Africa's population – an additional 450 million people – is expected to be living in urban areas (Kariuki et al., 2013). In many cases, African cities have outperformed their rural hinterlands and contributed to economic growth. According to the World Bank, urban population growth in sub-Saharan Africa is correlated not just with higher average incomes, but in many cases also with improvements in longevity, infant mortality, and access to services (Cartwright et al., 2018).[7]

However, there are also important challenges to growth in African cities, including lagging urban planning and infrastructure investment. A 2017 World Bank report describes urban centres on the continent as crowded but not dense agglomerations of neighborhoods inadequately serviced by transport infrastructure: rich in population but not in capital investment; disconnected and fragmented. They are also costly for households and businesses which face high expenditure on housing, transport, food and other goods and services (Lall et al., 2017). A lack of reliable electricity and transport infrastructure is holding back the expansion of manufacturing, stifling opportunity for rural–urban migrants to move out of poverty (Cartwright et al., 2018). For many Africans, moving to the city means transitioning from work in rural agriculture into the urban services sector, which employs as much as 60% of the urban workforce. An estimated 93% of new jobs created in urban centres are informal. Women are much more likely than men to work in informal, non-agricultural employment.

In the EU, population growth is higher in cities, especially due to migration, but the speed of urbanisation has slowed since the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1990s, 40% of cities lost population, a trend that somewhat attenuated in the 2000s. Capital cities tend to have the highest population growth, as well as the highest share of the working-age and foreign-born population (European Commission and UN Habitat, 2016). Economic performance is uneven between western and eastern European cities, as well as between capital cities and secondary cities. Western European states tend to have a share of

'left behind' cities, former industrial centres that have lost out to globalisation, with traditional activities moving elsewhere or being replaced by new technologies. In 2017, cities in a majority of the eastern EU member states outperformed rural areas economically, yet in western Europe employment rates were lower in cities than rural areas. Similarly, the proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion was higher in cities in 2017, a fact that may be connected to the larger presence of migrants from third countries whose employment rates are considerably lower than those of residents from EU countries (Eurostat, 2019).

Existing growth models have fuelled inequalities between and within cities. Residential segregation concentrates low-income, unskilled workers in parts of cities where jobs and services are scarce and crime levels high (Robbins, 2018: 12). In western Europe, Eurostat observes an 'urban paradox', whereby the same cities that 'generated high levels of wealth' were also reporting that 'relatively large shares of their populations were living with the risk of poverty or social exclusion' (Eurostat, 2019). Similarly, in many African cities, the rise of 'a new African urban elite and pockets of booming real estate' co-exists with 'large populations that remain without adequate public infrastructure and access to basic services' (Cartwright et al., 2018: 10). About 70% of Africa's urban population lives in informal settlements (World Bank, 2017) that started as temporary accommodations but have become intergenerational poverty traps, rather than 'stepping-stones to prosperity' (Buckley et al., 2018: 6).

Across Africa and Europe, disparities are likely to be aggravated, as government-imposed lockdowns in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic have put a harsh brake on growth and are bound to induce a steep economic recession. Cities have been particularly hard hit by the crisis, with 90% of Covid-19 cases occuring in urban centers (UN, 2020). As many as 100 million people living in cities are projected to fall into poverty as a result of the pandemic (C40 Cities, 2020). Cities also

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7   Urban dwellers in the region enjoy significantly higher levels of access to improved sanitation (40% versus 23%) and water (87% versus 56%) relative to rural areas.

experience an outsize fiscal impact from the pandemic, owing to a combination of increased expenditures for crisis response and decreased revenue due to shortfalls in fees, taxes and/or transfers from the national or intergovernmental level (UNECA, 2020). Many will face pressure to adopt austerity measures and budget cuts in the future (OECD, 2020).

As the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated cities' structural vulnerabilities – linked to gross inequities, density, mobility, unplanned growth, and reliance on supply chains – it is prompting mayors and cities to rethink existing growth and development models. Going forward, cities may seek greater self-reliance, such as through developing urban farming and more localised energy generation and distribution systems. Amsterdam has been a pioneer in adopting circular economy ideas and is using the 'doughnut economy' model – which seeks to overcome GDP as the defining measure of a thriving city – to guide its recovery (Kusmer, 2020). C40's Global Mayors Covid-19 Recovery Taskforce has endorsed the '15-minute city' as a guidepost for 'building back better' after the pandemic by trading off economic efficiency for the creation of greater equity and redundancy, key characteristics of a more resilient system. The idea is to bring opportunities to work, access essential services and spend leisure time to all parts of a city and within easy reach of all residents. Both Paris and Milan are using this vision to guide their recovery efforts, including the expansion of coworking spaces and bike lanes to reduce car traffic, provision of open air markets and green spaces across neighbourhoods, and the use of existing amenities in creative ways to expand service provision (C40 Cities, 2020).

Despite the pandemic, which saw countries and regions turn inward and towards unilateral actions – shutting borders to prevent the spread of the virus and halting international trade, tourism and migration – cities continue to seek connection. Mayors and cities have weathered the crisis by learning from one another and relying on each other for support. The Mayors Dialogue seeks to support cities in identifying industries, sectors and services where cooperation with other cities can support their plans and capacity for recovery and achieving sustainable and inclusive urban growth. Cities participating in the Mayors Dialogue have identified the expansion and 'greening' of public housing and transport, ports and airports, and sanitation and waste management capacities as important priorities that provide opportunities to advance both job creation and inclusion goals. They also look to sectors such as (bio)technology, health care, tourism and the creative industries (fashion, music, culture) to generate growth and employment in the future (Hennessey et al., 2020).

In the first instance, the Dialogue is facilitating a new partnership between the cities of Freetown and Milan aimed at expanding the Sierra Leonean fashion and textiles industry, boosting the capacity and opening export markets for women entrepreneurs, while providing an opportunity for the fashion industry in Milan to investigate sustainable dyes, textiles, and ethical sourcing options in Sierra Leone and explore the West African market. An integral component of the project, which involves academic and industry partners on both ends, is to create mobility options for women and youth for the purpose of skills development. Based on detailed blueprints for a global skills partnership, including between Africa and Europe (Clemens, 2014; Barslund et al., 2019), cities have begun experimenting with this model, e.g. through the MENTOR programme, implemented between Milan, Turin, Tunis and several Moroccan cities.[8] Through the Mayors Dialogue, more such collaborations can be seeded and – with partnership from business, training institutions, governments and philanthropic support – scaled up.[9]

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8   See https://mobilitypartnershipfacility.eu/what-we-do/actions-pilot-projects/mentor-mediterranean-network-for-training-orientation-to-regular-migration.

9   The Bertelsmann Foundation, for instance, has invested in exploring the feasibility of a skills partnership between Germany and Morocco, and of employer-driven models involving other countries of origin. See www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/making-fair-migration-a-reality/project-topics/promoting-development-through-migration.

The solidarity challenge

Mayors' primary responsibility is to address inequities and promote social inclusion within their cities and communities.[10] De Shalit (2019) reports that city-dwellers conceive of inequality in the city differently from inequality in the nation state, suggesting that they have different concerns and political expectations towards city authorities than national governments. Inequality in the city is tightly associated with spatial concerns, i.e. access to services, amenities, public space and transportation. People also see urban inequality in relational terms, i.e. in terms of social capital and trust, their ability to feel secure and relaxed in their neighbourhood, enjoy the 'cool' parts of the city and 'genuinely feel part of it' (ibid.).

However, unlike in the nation state, city solidarity is not as clearly bounded. Cities are places of elective solidarity which, given their lack of enforceable borders, is in principle open-ended. By moving, people of diverse origins and backgrounds opt in and out of a shared identity as city residents. This solidarity of 'residence-based local citizenship' that is open to newcomers and internal diversity co-exists in cities with other forms of solidarity, including that of co-nationals whose membership in the nation state signals the 'intergenerational continuity' of a self-governing people that has duties towards future generations (Bauboeck, 2019). Landau (2010) observes that in African cities that see high rates of urbanisation and population fluctuation, the idea of a fixed and shared majority culture and identity that newcomers would have to adopt in order to belong does not hold. Instead, all residents are in a certain state of flux, lacking a sense of collective identity. For newcomers who struggle to integrate locally, co-ethnic or co-national networks, rather than the urban collective, can offer a sense of belonging.

As human mobility creates a sense of flux, it forces and invites city governments to seek a better understanding of their city's population dynamics – for instance through profiling exercises in partnership with community organisations, such as Slum Dwellers International's 'Know Your City' campaign (Kallergis, 2018), or by seeking the assistance of international organisations to produce a local migration profile, as Dakar is doing. The presence of migrant communities also compels cities to look beyond their boundaries. Often, city partnerships and twinning relationships that involve local governments or industry-led commercial and supply chain ties emerge from community and family-based translocal links established by migrants and diaspora networks. Cities' participation in cooperation projects may in some cases be motivated as much by the desire to support partners in other cities as it is to strengthen relations with migrants and diaspora in their own community (Smith, 2011).

In the Africa–Europe corridor, cities' traditional role as places of welcoming and inclusion is challenged by migration policies that often leave migrants who land in, return to or are being returned to cities in a state of transition or limbo. They may be stranded in a city that is not their ultimate destination, remain separated from family members they seek to reunite with, or lack secure legal status and thus a longer term perspective for settlement and stability. The situation of stranded migrants and those in transit draws cities into questions of migration management – such as facilitating family reunifications and returns – that touch on the prerogatives of national immigration policies. In 2015, European mayors came together in the Solidarity Cities initiative to support cities on the frontlines of refugee reception, including through pledges for relocating asylum seekers.[11] In the face of continued tragedy on the Greek islands,

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10 Social inclusion can be defined as 'the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society' which 'means to enhance their ability, opportunity and dignity'. People partake in society through markets (e.g. labour, land, housing, credit), services (e.g. electricity, health, education, water) and spaces (e.g. political, cultural, physical, social). Their exclusion from or inclusion in these spheres is generally driven by identity (World Bank, 2017).

11 See https://solidaritycities.eu.

advocacy continues with governments to allow for city-led relocations within the EU, as long as member states remain divided on the issue (Rankin, 2020).

Some cities have adopted local policies for inclusion that present a direct challenge to the membership policies of the state, as they seek to ensure an equal 'right to the city' for all dwellers, including access to services regardless of legal status. This includes cities declaring themselves 'sanctuary cities' or 'safe harbours', as Bristol and Mannheim have done, and adopting practices such as issuing local identification cards, as Zürich is considering, and introducing firewalls that allow migrants access to local services, including the police, without fear of immigration enforcement, as is the case in Amsterdam and Barcelona. Durban is providing a one-stop service centre for migrants through public-private cooperation and tackling gender-based violence as a barrier to inclusion. Dakar is looking to address the challenge of youth education and skills gaps through alternative credentialing (Hennessey et al., 2020).

The pandemic has tested cities' commitment to inclusion. While Covid-19 has impacted all people and all aspects of societies, migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people are facing unique challenges due to their legal and immigration status, informal employment, and restricted access to public benefits and healthcare systems (MMC, 2020). Their experiences are complicated by language and cultural barriers, xenophobia, racism, stigma, and exclusion. Mayors and local governments from all over the world have stepped up to respond pragmatically, urgently, and ethically to the crisis, especially where national governments have faltered or failed to recognise the severity of the issue (ibid.). While local leaders are shaping powerful, innovative responses to meet the needs of their communities – such as free access to healthcare, direct cash assistance regardless of status, and moratoriums on evictions and rent hikes – community needs tend to far exceed local capacities.

Centering cities in the Africa–Europe relationship

As the AU and EU prepare for a joint Summit to renew the partnership between both continents, the fallout from the Covid-19 crisis will undoubtedly raise thorny questions around a potential trade-off between internal EU and external north-south solidarity. The EU budget and recovery deal (European Council, 2020a), reached in July, and the draft EU Migration Pact, presented by the European Commission in September, are squarely focused on bridging internal political differences in Europe (European Commission, 2020). The postponement of the AU-EU Summit to 2021 presents an opportunity for mayors to strategically engage with both AU and EU political and institutional leadership to influence this process and center the role of cities as key actors and partners in shaping the future of the partnership. Prior to the last AU-EU Summit in 2017, local authorities from both continents came together to demand the inclusion of local representatives in the intergovernmental dialogue and call for a dedicated financial instrument to support the partnership.[12]

The Mayors Dialogue builds on this and other precedents of cities mobilising political leadership and practical solidarity as it seeks to establish relations of mutual political and operational support between African and European mayors, based on a shared commitment to effectively deliver for all city dwellers. Cities in Europe and Africa start from and operate under different conditions, yet they share the ambition to provide new directions for policymaking within and between the continents.

In the EU, the principle of subsidiarity is enshrined in the make-up of the union. Local and regional governments form part of its architecture through the Committee of the Regions (CoR), a political assembly composed of members from all EU countries elected at local or regional level, which serves as the institutional voice of cities and regions in the EU. In addition, cities feed their interests into EU legislative and policy processes through the Council of

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12 See https://africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/userfiles/final_declaration_local-government-forum_en.pdf.

European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and EUROCITIES, the network of Europe's largest cities. The European Commission has enacted a number of programmes targeted at urban areas and at more closely associating subnational governments with its policy making processes and initiatives, including in the field of the environment (e.g. green capital and green leaf initiatives), cohesion policy (URBACT) and through the Urban Agenda (Pact of Amsterdam), launched in 2016, which includes a thematic partnership on the inclusion of migrants and refugees.[13] However, national governments continue to control the flow of resources to cities and municipalities.

While decentralisation has made progress in Africa, the latitude afforded to African cities and local authorities remains circumscribed, pending significant structural improvements in many countries (UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance, 2015: 21). The African Union endorsed the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development in 2014 and vowed to create a High Council of Local Authorities as an advisory body of the AU (AU, 2014). However, by mid-2019, only 17 states had signed and six had ratified the Charter. At the 8th Africities summit in 2018, mayors reiterated their call to accelerate the process of setting up and bringing into operation the High Council. Since 2005, UCLG-Africa provides a common umbrella organization that unites and advocates for African cities and municipalities and their regional and national associations and provides them with services, from peer-exchanges and review mechanisms to capacity-building (through the African Local Government Academy, ALGA), and data and evidence.[14]

The key issues that are expected to be on the agenda when African and European governments meet next year – multilateralism, sustainable development, trade and investment, jobs, digitalisation, peace and security, human or people-centered development, and migration and mobility (European Council, 2020b) – all

come together and interact at city level. Local authorities not only have a stake in these issues, but also offer the possibility of experimenting with new solutions and new ways of working and governing. Local policy makers do not control all the levers to make growth happen and to make it inclusive, but they have some advantages, such as the ability to tailor, trial and scale new approaches; to target measures to those most in need or groups that have been left behind; to bring various policy agendas and actors together around shared goals; and to engage and empower community stakeholders (Lee, 2019).

The Mayors Dialogue will support local leadership in mobilising allies and resources to renew trust in governments' ability to deliver inclusive governance for the people. It positions mayors and cities as brokers of transnational learning, cooperation and partnerships that engage – from the outset – other actors as partners, including local communities, civil-society organisations (CSOs), business, national governments, regional and international organisations, academia, and private philanthropy. It will help mayors galvanise a coalition of allies and champions that support their vision and are ready to provide practical assistance in the form of resources, technical know-how, and mutual support for the development and implementation of city partnerships. In turn, such efforts are expected to help national governments regain credibility by supporting their ability to deliver on their public commitments.

Mayors chart a path, but in many cases cannot act alone. The Mayors Dialogue is a pledge of solidarity, as well as an expression of cities' need for solidarity from national governments and regional institutions in Africa and Europe. From supportive national urban policies and inclusion in national policy deliberations (e.g. on Covid-19 recovery) to greater fiscal autonomy and direct access to funding for the AU-EU partnership, 'local governments must be supported because they are better able to

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13 See https://urbact.eu and https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda.

14 See www.uclga.org.

respond to local needs including in coordination with community-based structures' (UNECA, 2020). The Mayors Dialogue will work closely with existing networks of cities and local governments to reinforce and crystallise proposals for empowering cities in the context of inter-governmental discussions on the future of the AU-EU partnership. It will also engage with African and European institutions to demonstrate the value of decentralising their efforts and funding distribution.

Cities are simultaneously places of the future, where new urban identities are forged, and places of the past, where struggles over national identity and collective self-representation are staged, as seen in debates and conflicts over statues and memorials in public places triggered by the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Exercising solidarity between cities in Africa and Europe is about building a bridge between the past and the future, between nations and people. It is about establishing a new 'us'. However, this cannot simply be postulated, but must be steadily built. Solidarity rests on relationships; it requires intention and commitment, and a willingness to change and even sacrifice (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2020). It needs, but ultimately must go beyond, political leadership, to find practical expression in the everyday actions and exchanges of people in Africa and Europe.

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