Summary

Migration and mobility bring both risks and opportunities for cities. Migrants often face specific barriers and obstacles that result in marginalization and vulnerability, and this puts them at risk of being one of the social groups within urban communities worst affected by natural and man-made hazards. By facilitating the access of migrants to social services and opportunities, increasing migration-related evidence-base for planning and managing cities, taking a comprehensive and broad approach to migration governance and investing in effective local solutions, city administrations can fulfill the rights of migrants and increase the resilience of the community as a whole, by protecting the entire population under their jurisdiction.

Context

A migrant is any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence, and his/her children, regardless of a person’s legal status; whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; what the causes for the movement are; or what the length of the stay is.

Regardless of what motivated or determined their mobility, migrants are part of the population local and regional officials manage. Given their background and status, migrants are a vulnerable segment of the urban population and at risk of being marginalized: some of the main chronic obstacles they face are linguistic barriers, legal and administrative barriers, reduced access to social networks, reduced knowledge of the local environmental and social context, inadequacy of skills for urban labor market, as well as discrimination and xenophobia. They may face the above mentioned obstacles regularly in their everyday lives, but in the event of acute shock these issues become even more pressing, and migrants’ need for assistance critical. It is therefore important, for migrants and city administrators alike, that policies for well-managed migration be developed.

IOM’s latest World Migration Report provides the evidence base, and the recent Conference on Migrants and Cities clarified the scope and applications of recommendations on how to manage migration well. Together, these offer the evidence base and relevant recommendations to comprehensively address ongoing concerns and raise awareness of migration in the contexts of urban planning and development.
Recommendations – key policy options:

a) Increase migrants’ access to essential resources, services and opportunities, including formal housing, employment, health care, education and social support systems. Accompanied by good planning and local coordination, these aspects help reduce risks of marginalization and increased vulnerability to natural and man-made hazards. Proactive and inclusive urban planning at the local level and effective national mobility management policies are essential to preventing the potential vulnerabilities linked with movement into cities, as well as for building the resilience and increasing the well-being of migrants.

b) Target data collection and development of solutions to geographical areas where migrants and communities interact, such as where migrants originate from, live, work, pass through or return to, that can lead to increased vulnerability. Vulnerability among migrants stems not only from individual but also from structural and environmental factors specific to a location, including the relationship between migrant and local populations. Supporting migration management from an area-based approach to programming and coordination incorporates the different scales as relevant for the urban context, adapts to the interrelatedness of multiple sectors.

c) Work towards comprehensive operational guidelines to align and combine humanitarian and development migration management efforts in understanding urban risk, preventing and responding to urban crises. Migration is relevant to many issues cities must manage, linked to social cohesion and equity; urban frameworks and planning; spatial development; jobs, livelihoods and the urban economy; the environment, climate change and urban resilience; and housing and basic services. This also means working towards building standing coordination mechanisms between different levels and parts of the government, which would facilitate scaling up of responses by calling on wider institutional systems that can mobilize resources, help protect and assist victims, mitigate losses, avoid massive displacement and accelerate recovery.

d) Support local solutions to migration, where possible, and move from a mindset of supply to one of strengthening existing functional governance systems. This means better recognizing and leveraging the different capacities and comparative advantages of local, national and international actors, and allows relying on the capabilities and resources that are already in place in cities rather than re-creating or duplicating systems. It entails building on coping mechanisms of the different individuals and communities that have proven functional value and thus avoid dependency to external support. It means creating governance mechanisms that are truly inclusive and have the capacity to respond to the needs of all categories of population and foster a participatory environment.
Conclusion

In the next decades, the number of migrants living in cities will almost double, yet many local governments and cities do not include migrants in their city planning process.

When urban migration is well-managed, it can induce social and economic dynamics that enhance the capacity of urban migrants to cope with shocks and pressures. Additionally, when sound policies are implemented and local actors are engaged, they can play a significant role in enhancing the developmental impacts of migration. Thus, it is essential to help fulfil the rights of migrants, if cities are to benefit from the opportunities they bring.