Mediterranean City-to-City Migration

Dialogue, Knowledge and Action

Webinar

Children on the Move: Including Unaccompanied Minors

31 July

Summary of Discussions

Within the framework of the MC2CM project, this webinar was the fourth of a series that tackle topics like housing, inclusion, childhood and youth. This webinar was the first hosted by UCLG, and aimed at structuring a dialogue between local authorities, civil society and international organizations on the protection and inclusion of unaccompanied minors and children on the move. UCLG and UNICEF, with the support of its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (CSIPDHR) moderated two 1h30 sessions (French and English) in which cities were invited to share their experiences and challenges on protecting, caring and including migrant children and youth, in particular unaccompanied minors. Through exchange of experiences, successful models, lessons learned and planning strategies, local authorities can improve responses for migrant children and youth - to help make migration work for all.
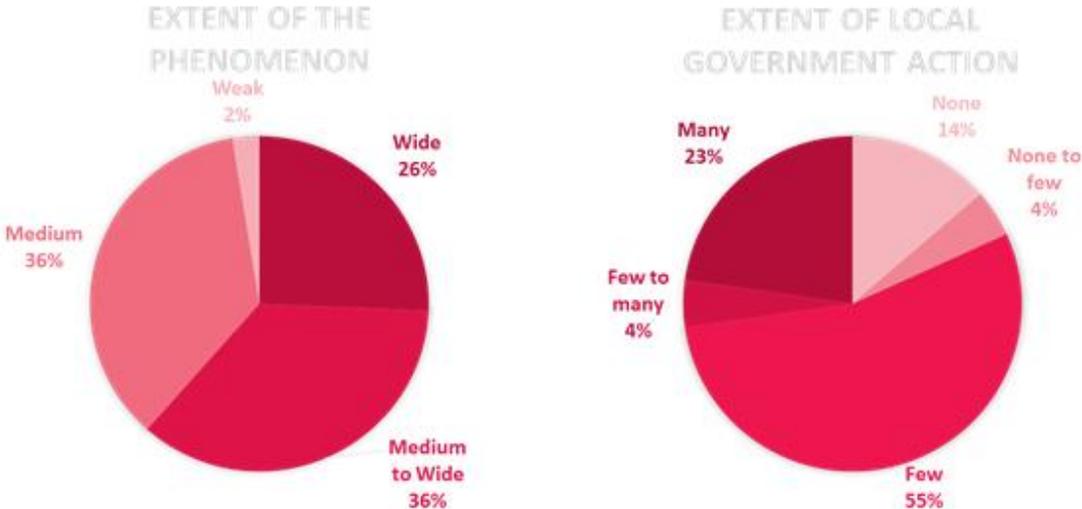
The webinar was introduced by **Mohamed Boussraoui, Senior Migration Manager at UCLG**, who highlighted the growing relevance of this topic in cities like Barcelona. His intervention was complemented by the video testimony of **Neus Arnal, social worker in Catalonia (Spain)**, who stressed the intimate link between care arrangements and security concerns when addressing the issue of minors on the move, the former enabling the latter and vice versa. In line with these introductory remarks, the webinar consisted of 3 main parts:

1. An interactive session to present good practices of cities
2. A presentation by UNICEF on its local agenda for minors on the move
3. An introduction of the "No Child in the Street" Campaign of UCLG-Africa and REFELA

Around 45 representatives from local governments, CSOs and international organizations participated in this webinar, which tackled major local concerns and proposed inspiring practices and recommendations. Most of the registered participants came from big cities around the Mediterranean basin, especially from North Africa and Southern Europe.

In preparation for this webinar, cities were consulted about their perception and experience with minors on the move. Asked about the perceived impact of this phenomenon in their territory, the majority defined it as "medium-to-wide" or "wide". Nevertheless, when asked about the extent of local action in this realm, the overall perception was that there were "few" initiatives implemented.

EXTENT OF THE PHENOMENON

- Weak 2%
- Wide 26%
- Medium 36%
- Medium to Wide 36%

EXTENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTION

- Many 23%
- None 14%
- None to few 4%
- Few to many 4%
- Few 55%

As for the relevant actors involved in the urban governance of children and young migrants, there were relevant regional differences among respondents that have to do with the different levels of decentralization of childhood protection laws. Accordingly, while European cities tend to highlight the role of local governments, cities in North Africa address national governments as key stakeholders. In both cases, the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) was underlined by the majority.

Thematic priorities

MENA Region | Southern Europe | Continental Europe
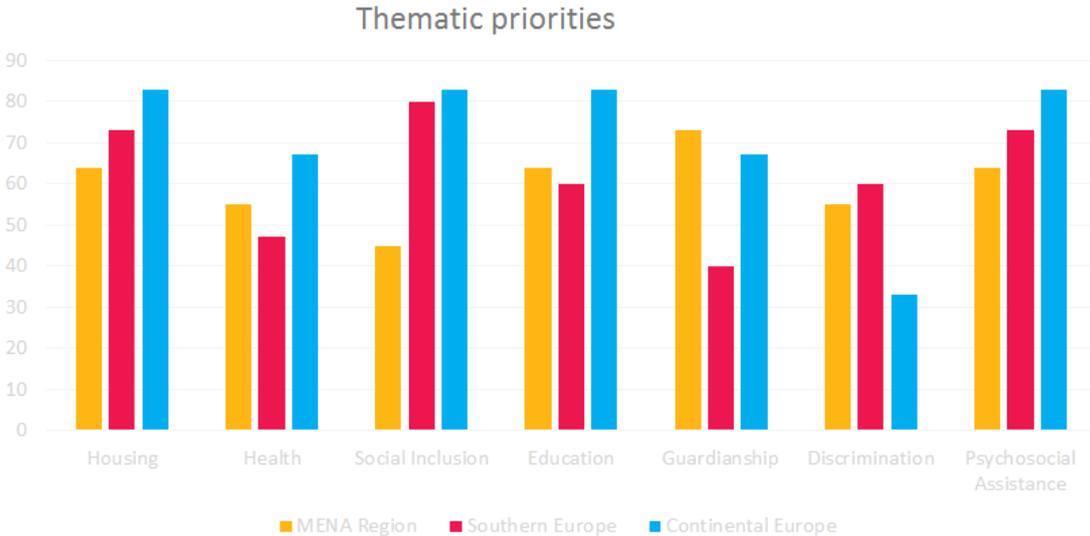
Lastly, with regard to the priority topics, housing, social inclusion and psychosocial support were at the top of the list. Regional differences were apparent in addressing the importance of topics like discrimination, guardianship or social inclusion holds a similar status.

Local forum of experiences and perspectives

The second part of the webinar offered a space to present and debate around local practices on the issue of unaccompanied minors and children on the move. Practices were most of the times led by local authorities, but there were various participants who also represented CSOs working on this topic in cooperation with local governments. This section included a presentation by the secretariat of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, which shortlisted relevant practices led by some of its members (in the text are identified through the marker "CSIPDHR"). This section includes contributions made in the French and English versions.

Overcoming limitations: Multi-level governance and cooperation with civil society

In Tunisia, municipalities such as **Sfax** barely have competences to carry out actions on this field, even though the city is directly confronted to the arrival of unaccompanied minors who lost their parents while they were migrating through Libya. However, Sfax was able to share during the webinar its work of coordination with local representatives of the national government (civil registry, administrative services) to speed up UMs regularization process, as well as with local and international NGOs providing UMs access to basic needs. A representative of **UCLG's MEWA** section described a similar scenario for the Middle East, yet in this case local authorities were already cooperating with NGOs in a more structured way on issues such as access to housing or language courses.

Mexico City has recently seen the arrival of "migrant caravans" from other parts of Central America, formed among other groups also by unaccompanied minors. As Mexico's capital does not have formal competences over children guardianship (as seen in almost the rest of participant cities), the City tried at least to work with national authorities and coordinate with local associations on issues such as emergency shelter and covering basic needs. Mexico City could also support young migrants who were older than 18 through the program "Ciudad Hospitalaria".

As shown by Málaga, Nador and Naples, local governments can find in civil society relevant partners in the reception and inclusion process. As argued by a participant, "*although local authorities might not have direct competences over this issue, they can have an impact on it by cooperating with us*".

In **Málaga**, the Moroccan Association for Migrants Integration supports unaccompanied minors that just turned 18 to access an accommodation and to find a job, very much like the cooperative Dedalus in **Naples**. Both NGOs receive funding and coordinate with their municipalities. In **Nador**, Asticude Association organized events supporting access to education. More specifically, and thanks to its cooperation with the national government and the local government, Asticude has put in place programs to guarantee the right to education for UM and children on the move.

Guaranteeing access to social and economic rights: Housing, basic services and work inclusion

Access to accommodation was identified as key priority in many contexts. In its written contribution, the **Metropolis of Lyon** showed its plan to achieve 850 new slots in temporary accommodations for UM, as well as 500 slots including accommodation and care attention and 300 slots on day attention centres for unaccompanied minors staying in hotels. Similar to the case of Lyon, the French

departmental council of Seine-Saint-Denis (*CSIPDHR*) also created a service offering accommodation and care services for UM so that they can follow a more structured integration process. In **Rabat**, and due to the lack of competences, the municipality has transformed abandoned municipal facilities, such as old schools, into urgency accommodation centres for unaccompanied minors.

The examples of **Naples** and **Málaga** showed how can local authorities work with NGOs in ensuring access to accommodation for UM once they turn 18 and are no longer under "guardianship". These associations may support young migrants access their own accommodation (an already challenging step due to housing unaffordability and discrimination) or provide shelters of their own.

Utrecht has put in place an innovative approach on this issue by promoting the "Plan Einstein": A residential building where local citizens and refugees (among which many youngsters) live together and follow a civic integration path. This is as a way of supporting access to housing as well as to offer inclusion opportunities in the host society, in a similar vein to that of **Antwerp's** CURANT project (*CSIPDHR*): Another co-housing initiative offering accommodation to young refugees and young locals in the same residential building, and which receives support from a team of educators and coaches.

The work of several Swedish municipalities (compiled by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions – SALAR) was presented by CSIPDHR as an example of how local governments can make it easier for unaccompanied minors to access basic services. **Malmö** developed information material in various languages, aimed at clarifying the different steps that UM have to take once they arrive to Sweden in regards to access to basic services and regularization. **Kristianstad** has also developed written and visual information material in different languages to use with unaccompanied minors when interpretation services are not available. **Gothenburg** has also produced information material, but this time focused on training those people working with unaccompanied minors themselves.

The cases of **Nuremberg** and **Ghent** were presented by the CSIPDHR as comprehensive models of refugee integration (including language courses, regularization, access to basic services and fostering job inclusion) that considered the specificities of young refugees and unaccompanied minors.

Vienna's Jugendcollege (*CSIPDHR*) was presented as a comprehensive policy aimed at making it easier for young migrants (the program targets 15 to 21 years old residents) to access the labour market and follow their integration course in the host society. This policy offers a series of modules in German language, cultural orientation and personal career development services (which include internship and job opportunities), alongside social integration initiatives. **Sundbyberg** (*CSIPDHR*), in Sweden, has a similar policy aimed at UM, which includes the provision of internship and summer job opportunities alongside career orientation and mentorship. Several NGOs participating in the webinar also offer career orientation services to young migrants that just turned 18 years old.

Towards a comprehensive care and integration process

Many of these practices sought to make it easier for unaccompanied minors to follow their integration in the host society. **Grigny**, in France, has a 34% of foreign population, among which a relevant number of unaccompanied minors and young migrants. The city has sought to offer them language courses mixed with socialization workshops, so that locals can welcome newcomers to the city. The City of Grigny also shared throughout the webinar how several French municipalities have created a national association of "Welcoming Cities and Territories (ANVITA)" which focuses on exchanging practices and hosting political debates among its members with a national audience.

Action on non-discrimination was also identified as key to guarantee social cohesion in this regard. Malaga's **Moroccan Association for Migrants Integration** has promoted a website (https://www.extutelados.es/) which focuses on making their personal stories (those of young residents who arrived to the city as UM) available to the host society as a way to raise awareness within the host society. Naples' **Dedalus Cooperative** has put in place a website which has a similar purpose yet follows a "blog" format (http://minorimigranti.coopdedalus.org/). **Nador** has developed similar initiatives focusing on youth dialogue and cultural exchange with local residents.

Local governments have also taken the initiative in this field. This is the case of **Goicoechea** (*CSIPDHR*), in Costa Rica, which counts with a consolidated mechanism of citizen participation (the "tables of dialogue") which has been used as a way to raise awareness among local population on the situation of young migrants in connection to human rights.

The representative of the network of **Andalusian Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI)** shared the rich experience of local authorities in this region in regards to social inclusion programs for unaccompanied minors. A guide on "good practices in the attention of unaccompanied minors in Andalusia" was shared by FAMSI during the webinar, which includes initiatives in socio-affective integration or school integration. In regards to education, the example of **Eksjö** (*CSIPDHR*) showed how local authorities can use municipal facilities – in the case of this Swedish city, a municipal library – to carry out events like story-telling for children or language café targeting UM and other children and youngsters in the city (another way to have a positive impact in terms of socialization).

Local governments and global advocacy

In the field of international advocacy around children's rights, UNICEF and the regional section of UCLG in Africa (UCGL-A), together with its Network of Locally Elected Women in Africa (REFELA), presented campaigns focused on sensitizing cities on their central role in child protection, social inclusion and improved living conditions for all.

UNICEF introduced its local agenda and acknowledged that cities and local governments "are uniquely placed to protect the rights of migrant and displaced children within their areas of influence,'' especially in six key areas where children on the move face significant challenges:
- Protection
- Child immigration detention
- Access to services
- Family separation and legal status

- Factors that drive children from their homes, like protracted conflicts, persistent violence and extreme poverty
- Xenophobia, discrimination and social exclusion

As an overarching principle, all actions aimed at providing access to quality services for refugee, migrant and IDP children should go hand-in-hand with support to local communities as a whole, along with a specific focus on including the most vulnerable among them.

1. Ensuring immediate and effective access to free and quality education for all children in the city, regardless of migration status.

2. Whenever possible, establishing or supporting firewalls between local service providers and immigration authorities or law enforcement agencies, so undocumented children and their parents do not feel discouraged from using local services for fear of being detected, detained and returned.

3. Encouraging universities, non-governmental organizations and corporate actors to make places available to refugee, migrant and IDP students in all their programs.

4. Promoting social inclusion and measures to combat xenophobia and discrimination

5. Partnering with local businesses to support access to the labor market and entrepreneurship for young migrant and displaced people.

6. Ensuring that existing or new city-level child and youth initiatives are inclusive of migrants, ranging from social and cultural events, sports activities and youth councils.

7. Appointing, training and monitoring qualified guardians for unaccompanied and separated children.

Link to presentation

Face to the dimension of vulnerable minors in the streets of many cities in the African continent, **UCLG-Africa and REFELA** joined forces to raise awareness on this issue. The campaign is in line with the implementation of the African (2063-AU) and international Agendas, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDOs), whose commitment is to "leave no one out". This campaign, based on voluntary adhesion, seeks 3 main objectives:
- Raise awareness on the situation of children living on the streets of African cities and exposed to all forms of exploitation;
- Mobilize to support and strengthen the capacity of local governments to give a second chance to these children;
- Support and accompany signatory cities by providing them with an intervention model to effectively deal with the phenomenon

Link to presentation