



Barcelona City Hall with a banner that says "Refugees Welcome".

Credit: Joseph Bracons. Flickr.com

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Abstract

Mainstreaming, a governance strategy based on coordination between government levels and the involvement of various policy sectors and actors (including institutional, private and civil society), is often adopted by local governments in different policy realms, including in managing migration and integration at the local level. Overall, mainstreaming migrant integration has the potential to enhance migrants' rights and can be a significant force in achieving gender equality. Given the challenges and dynamics posed by the feminisation of migration, city leaders can contribute to promote migrants' rights and gender equality by including migrants – and migrant women – in policy making, taking into account local contexts and challenges, even when these are part of national and international dynamics.

About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organization is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments.

Mainstreaming Migrant Rights for Gender Equality

Lessons from Lisbon and Barcelona

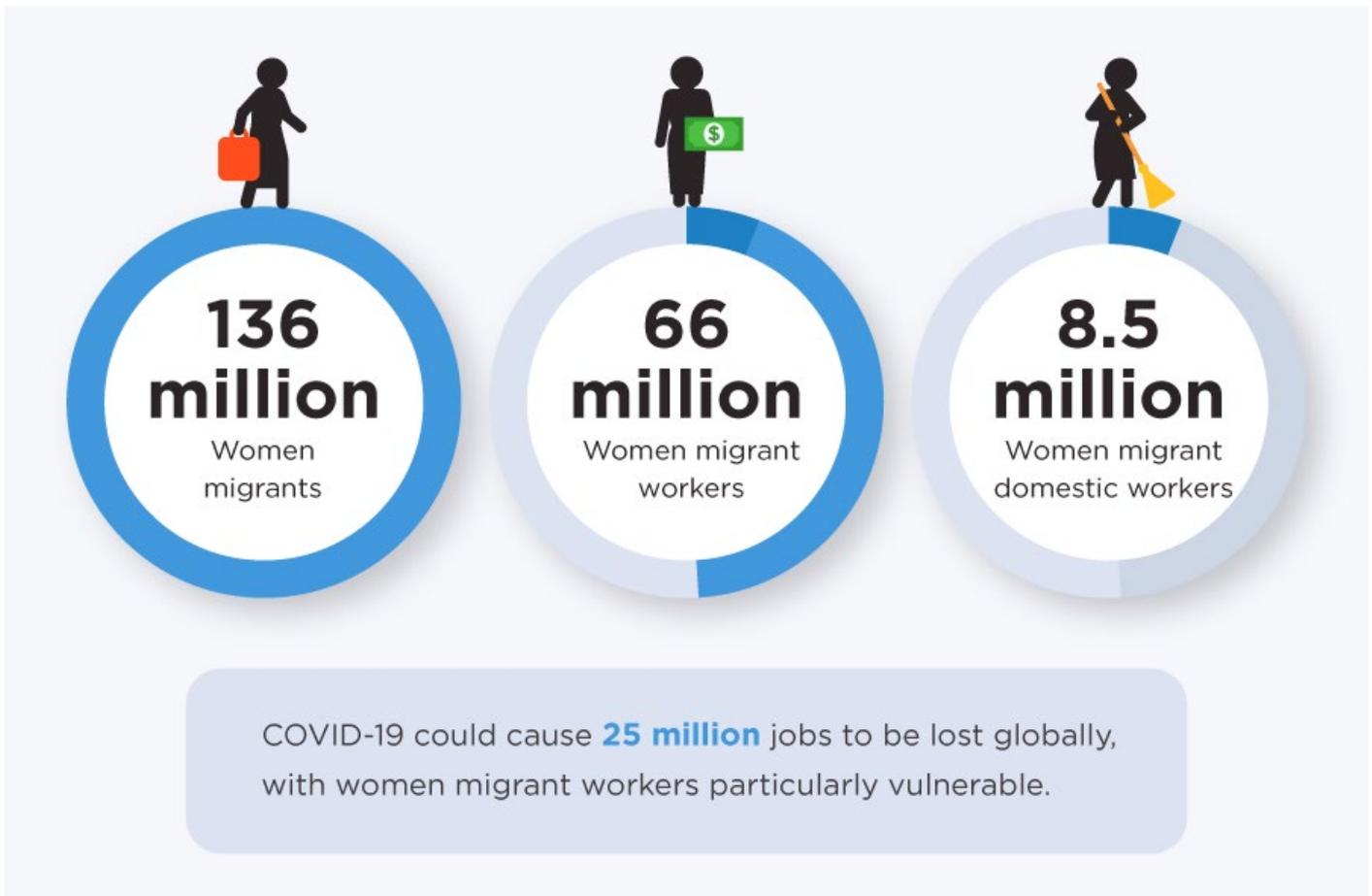
Introduction

Cities are the geographies where local, national and supranational migration and integration policies intersect with migrants' agency and aspirations. Several authors argue about the advantages of city-level migration governance and point out that migrants tend to identify more with the city they live in than with their host country, and tend to be more trusting of local governments compared to the native population (Bauböck 2003, Localmultidem 2009, Penninx 2009, Anthias et al. 2012, Barber 2013, Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx 2016). Migrant integration is mainly promoted at the local level, but while municipalities are expected to adhere to supranational and national policies they can, in practice, provide alternatives that resist or comply (Fonseca et al. 2002, Alexander 2007, Wood and Landry 2008).



Lisbon and Barcelona are both centers of large metropolitan regions and contribute significantly to the economy of their respective countries. They are also immigration destinations, attracting migrants with lower levels of education (OECD & EU 2018). Migrant populations in both localities have been significantly increasing with some shared attributes: For example, a high proportion of migrants in both cities originate from former colonies, as well as South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India), China, Eastern Europe, the European Union, and North Africa (particularly Morocco regarding Barcelona). The percentage of migrant women rose to about 50 percent in the past few years.

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Feminisation of migration. In 2020, the UN estimated that there were 136 million women migrants. Many were employed in the reproductive sector, which includes healthcare, both formal and informal, and domestic services. Migrant women face intersecting forms of discrimination – relating to their multiple identities as women and migrants, as well as their race, ethnicity, nationality, age, employment status, social class, etc. Together, these characteristics affect their access to rights and services in both countries of origin and destination, which became a pressing matter during the COVID-19 pandemic. A human rights-centred approach to migration policies is, therefore, one that is centred on gender equality.

Credit: UN Women.

What is the feminisation of migration?

The feminisation of migration refers to the increasing number, proportion and visibility of women in transnational migrations, recognizing their position of greater vulnerability and acknowledging that migration is a gendered process. This process happens at the intersection of:

- the feminisation of poverty: the percentage of women living below the poverty line is higher than men, and the possibility of women becoming poor in the future is also higher,
- the feminisation of labour: the greater participation of women in the workforce, which also corresponds to greater deterioration of working conditions.

This is a tendency confirmed by several studies at the EU level (Rubin et al. 2008, Barslund et al. 2017, Ballarino & Panichella 2018). Gender is also significant when considering municipal integration policies, with gender equality emerging as a normative paradigm for successful integration.

Methodology

We draw from Critical Frame Analysis¹ (Meier 2008, Dombos 2012) to analyze municipal policies in migration and integration management, considering their interactions with regional, national and supranational policies. This methodology is applied to the most significant institutional texts on migration governance produced by both municipalities since the turn of the century, which were collected from their official websites.²



Barcelona Diverse City. Flyers providing migrants with information on registering to vote in local elections and on living in Barcelona.

Photo Credit: Ajuntament Barcelona. Flickr.com

Barcelona Refugee City: a political statement for equal rights

Barcelona City Hall's key documents on migration are quite vague and consist mostly of guidelines for good practices to be carried out by municipal bodies, civil society organisations and the private sector. Each document prioritizes access to employment as the axis for integration and addresses the presence of migrant women in the city, but they do so in different ways. For example, while the 2012³ plan actually reinforces gender stereotypes by associating women with the private sphere, the 2016⁴ document adopts a feminist and intersectional perspective, actively promoting the participation of migrant women and their organisations through specific measures. This tendency is further deepened in the 2018 plan.

Migrant organisations have been involved in the plans since 2010 and are also participants in the municipality's project **"Barcelona Refugee City"** that dates back to when Barcelona declared itself a Sanctuary City in 2015, in response to the so-called "refugee crisis"⁵. The project's goals are to pressure the international community to respect humanitarian law and the Spanish government to fulfil its quota of refugees, as well as to prepare municipal services to receive and integrate refugees arriving in the city. In effect, **Barcelona's positioning as a Refugee City creates a discursive space for advocacy for the rights of all migrants, with the municipality demanding that economic migrants have access to the same international protection as refugees, stating that they, too, left their countries in search of safety.** Barcelona City Hall, thus, positions itself as a lobbyist for migrant rights, and, in the process, provides a platform for migrant organisations – including those led by women and where women are active participants – to access international institutions, transnational Non-Governmental Organisations and (local, national and supranational) parliamentary groups, bringing migrant rights advocacy to the limelight.

Self-employment and gender outsourcing in Lisbon: Better than nothing

In Lisbon, migration plans were created in the collaboration with migrant organisations, with the latest plan going one step beyond, as it was prepared after open meetings in strategic neighbourhoods. It is clear that city authorities regard migration as a sustainable economic resource and a source of foreign investment, particularly after the 2009-2012 Financial

¹ Critical Frame Analysis allows for the study of multiple dimensions of policy-making and policy implementing, through critical discourse analysis, policy frame analysis, policy process analysis and analysis of political opportunity structures, and is a valuable tool to uncover implicit and explicit representations of policies' objects and subjects, and to identify who is given a voice and is included – or no voice and is excluded – from the realm of policy-making and policy implementing.

² Barcelona's is here: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ca/> and Lisbon's is located here <https://www.lisboa.pt/>.

³ Available at <http://www.bcn.cat/barcelonainclusiva/ca/2014/1/plaimmigracio.pdf> (12.05.2021)

⁴ Available at https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/consell-municipal-immigracio/sites/default/files/documents/platreball1619_ca.pdf (12.05.2021)

⁵ This brief is built on the belief that the EU is experiencing a "reception crisis", not a "refugee crisis", as it is the structures that should welcome, support and integrate refugees across the EU that are in crisis. Further, invoking a "refugee crisis" places the responsibility on the refugees themselves, not on the institutions that are failing to uphold their responsibilities and follow international law.



Lisbon City Hall.

Photo credit: Diego Delso, delso.photo

Crisis, where the first plan focused on employment and whether the migrant was able to create their own job or, better yet, generate further employment. In these plans entrepreneurship, then, replaced labour rights, placing the responsibility of entry into the job market on the migrant, thus obscuring the reality identified in the diagnosis part of the plan itself (a reality characterized by recruitment discrimination, low wages, precarious employment and higher rates of unemployment). In 2018, the focus shifted to fostering intercultural relations, with the plan adopting stronger human rights language. However, within the 2018 plan, human rights related responsibilities are largely attributed to local civil society organisations, including in promoting gender equality. Thus, rather than gender mainstreaming its migration policies Lisbon City Hall is “gender outsourcing/downgrading, as it is third parties, mostly civil society organizations, that are giving responsibilities in pursuing all tasks relating to pursuing gender equality”. Nonetheless, the inclusion of gender at all is an improvement to the national migration plans, which remain, to date, completely gender-blind (ACM 2015).

Conclusion

In Lisbon and Barcelona, migration is celebrated as a competitive advantage for urban development, economic integration and social cohesion, even if from different perspectives:

- in Lisbon, migration is first seen as an economic advantage, with positive implications in terms of human rights;
- in Barcelona, where the intercultural approach to migration governance was inaugurated, migration has been a human rights issue from the outset, but became more so in recent years.

This is particularly noticeable when considering the approach to the gender-migration nexus in both cities: while the proportion of women migrants, their professional occupation, economic class and origin countries are similar, the feminisation of migration has been a clear concern in the migration plans in Barcelona, though with shortcomings. In Lisbon the feminisation of migration is only a more recent – and rather superficial – concern. This awareness is not translated into actions by the city hall itself, but rather outsourced to local civil society organisations. This is paradoxical, particularly taking into account that Lisbon’s migration plans are clear in their awareness of the frailties faced by these associations – described as small, understaffed, based in volunteer work, and characterized by financial, logistical and facilities-related difficulties. In Barcelona, gender mainstreaming in migration governance was reinforced with the most recent leaderships. *Barcelona en Comú*’s approach takes its departure from a clearly feminist interpretation of the presence of migrant women in the city, specifically of their role in the reproductive sector. The city hall acknowledges and prioritizes the structural inequalities, intersectional discrimination and precarity affecting this group.

Questions for local governments

- Who are the migrant women in your city? Where do they come from? What do they do for a living?
- What policies exist to integrate migrant women in your municipality? What avenues are present locally for migrant participation in their own integration processes?
- How can enhancing the rights of migrant women in your city contribute to fostering a human rights-centred city for all its residents?

Recommendations for Policy Makers



1. Involve migrant organisations and city residents in the draft of key policies and plans

- As in case of Barcelona and, in particular, Lisbon.



2. Lobby for migrant rights

- Cities are at a privileged position to promote migrants' human rights locally, nationally and internationally. They have privileged access to fora where they can present a unified discourse promoting migrant rights and gender equality and can organise in networks to promote migrant rights;
- Policy makers in Lisbon and Barcelona demonstrate awareness of the feminisation of migration, which is frequently absent from national and international policy making around migration. This means there is an opportunity for cities to advocate for gender equality in migration at different scales.



3. Mainstream migrant women's participation for impact

- Promote continuous participation and collaboration;
- Consider partners' (migrants organizations, local CSOs, other local councils) input in designing and implementing integration strategies, policies and measures;
- Cultivate collaboration beyond service providing. Meaningful partnerships can be built if participants in migration governance are valued as more than service providers;
- Municipal government can work to capacitate civil society organisations through training, assistance in resource management, and fair and adequate funding.



4. Include gender perspectives – consider the experiences of migrant women in designing migrant integration policies

- Considering migrant women's positioning as an entry point to promote all migrants' human rights;
- Ensure the presence of migrant women by, for example, creating online avenues of participation and/or designing alternative meeting spaces.
- Challenge stereotypes about migrant women considering the intersections between feminisation of migration, feminisation of labour and feminisation of poverty, through the creation and dissemination of public discourses that acknowledge migrant women's contribution to better city living.

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