TransAtlantic
COUNCIL on
MIGRATION

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Fostering an Inclusive Identity Where It Matters Most: At the Local Level

Council Statement

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FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE IDENTITY WHERE IT MATTERS MOST: AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

COUNCIL STATEMENT

Extraordinary Meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration

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I.   Introduction

As laboratories for social change, cities constantly redefine what it means to belong to a place. Cities show remarkable ability to absorb new members—and become even more vibrant in the process. But unprecedented population churn, rapid social change, and a difficult fiscal climate have refocused attention on the civic glue that holds cities together. As a result, many cities on both sides of the Atlantic are now actively seeking to build a stronger and more inclusive local identity, both to bring together existing communities and create an appealing global brand that will cast them in the best light to entice talent and business.

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI)'s Transatlantic Council on Migration and the municipality of Rotterdam brought together high-level city officials from Europe and North America in April 2014 to consider the potential that "urban citizenship" offers for building a new "we" at the local level.[1] This extraordinary meeting of the Council focused on the fact that many cities are in the midst of an identity crisis. As one participant put it, "half your population wants the world to be the way it used to be, and the other half wants to be treated the way the other half is treated."

Guided by a shared sense that local belonging has reached an inflection point, participants exchanged strategies to unite cities, open up services for diverse groups, and create more cohesive communities.

Five drivers lie behind today's urban reality:

The changing face of urban populations. Diversity has become the norm, and "super diversity" is gaining ground.[2] Several European cities are on the cusp of becoming majority-minority cities, and the demographics of most cities diverge widely from their countries at large—more than 60 percent of the foreign-born populations of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries are concentrated in cities.[3] Meanwhile, nontraditional forms of mobility, such as mixed asylum and illegal flows from North Africa and much greater movement within the European Union, have increased population turnover, leaving more people on the margins of society. And as more and more immigrants settle in farms, industrial parks, and suburbs, communities are growing away from the hub of urban interaction. These peripheral settlements may be at greater risk of social isolation.

The harsh economic realities confronting localities. While cities are still feeling the pinch of austerity— local integration budgets in particular have been slashed—they nonetheless do not have the luxury to withhold services from city residents, even those who are unauthorized or otherwise formally ineligible for benefits (such as some groups of newly arrived, mobile European Union citizens). For some cities, including those on Europe's borders, responding to emergencies and meeting migrants' basic needs are directing resources away from long-term integration goals. Others are suffering from a perilous waste of human capital, with a "lost generation" of young people, immigrant and native born, both out of school and work. As cities' bandwidth to develop policies and provide services for newcomers shrinks, their long-term economic health—which depends on attracting fresh human capital to mitigate the effects of aging populations—may, in turn, be jeopardized.

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1   This meeting built on two previous Transatlantic Council on Migration (TCM) plenary meetings: *Rethinking National Identity in the Age of Immigration* (November 2011), whose reports are collected at www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/transatlantic-council-migration/november-2011-meeting, and *Cities and Regions: Reaping Migration's Local Dividends* (November 2013), whose reports are collected at www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/transatlantic-council-migration/cities-and-regions-reaping-migration-local-dividends.

2   "Super diversity" refers to the diversity of diversity, meaning instead of a few ethnic or national minorities most cities' minority populations come from multiple countries of origin. See Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications," Ethnic and Racial Studies 29 (6): 1024-54.

3   Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Settling In: OECD Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2012* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/settling-in-oecd-indicators-of-immigrant-integration-2012_9789264171534-en.

Rapid, concentrated social change. Previous Migration Policy Institute (MPI) research has pointed to the pace, rather than the extent, per se, of social change as the central driver of public anxiety about immigration.[4] Since city neighborhoods are often the first to receive immigrants, some have changed dramatically in a short time, prompting natives to move onward or out to the suburbs and thus fuel further residential segregation. Elsewhere, large and unexpected population growth concentrated in a few areas has exacerbated concerns about overburdened transport and services. In some cities, a rise in gang membership and social unrest—driven by socioeconomic factors such as a lack of education and employment, rather than diversity per se—has amplified these concerns.

A tricky political climate. The views of urban populations toward immigration are often more tolerant than those of the national population at large, affording city leaders some latitude to extend a warmer welcome to newcomers. But when the political preferences of cities and countries diverge, cooperation on issues affecting immigration and integration can become increasingly difficult. Some cities are being more muscular than others, implementing coercive national policies selectively. Others are trying to fill the gaps left by national governments, such as by granting services to all residents, regardless of status. But as the size of the urban population without the right (or inclination) to vote grows, city leaders in many instances find it harder to promote equitable policies while retaining their political base—and the rise of far-right parties complicates matters further.

A new phase of integration policy. Against this backdrop of social, demographic, economic, and political transition, a debate is raging about how to think about immigrant integration policy. Several cities—and countries—are rethinking the way that integration policies are organized and delivered, creating or dissolving ministerial or other public posts, and reorganizing the integration portfolio. Cities confront a number of questions, including how to distribute integration responsibilities across government levels, how to coordinate policies and programs for diverse groups, and how to tailor mainstream services to better accommodate diverse populations (and thereby defuse the political reaction to group-specific policies). As cities change the way they themselves are organized, how they address the issues that surround immigration and integration will become especially pertinent.

II.   Toward Greater Cohesion and Economic Growth

These five challenges have raised the stakes for local identity. Cohesive local communities are not only essential to the welfare of all residents, they are critical to economic competitiveness—both by unlocking the potential of existing populations and by attracting new talent. In meeting this challenge, cities have one clear advantage: their adaptability. Since city identity is not defined by ethnic or national criteria, it may be more accessible than national identity and a better complement for the multiple allegiances that characterize today's world. The Council identified a number of core principles to help cities capitalize on this potential and support the construction of a new "we":

1. *Combine symbolic gestures with pragmatic actions.* Practices such as city identity cards or Barcelona's system of padrón (for which all residents are required to register, regardless of legal status) do more than offer a means of identification and access to services. They also provide a sense of legitimacy and symbolic belonging, especially for unauthorized or marginalized groups. Innovative adaptations to identity cards, such as financial literacy components or incentive schemes to encourage residents to use city services, help get the most out of such strategies.

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4   Demetrios G. Papademetriou, *Rethinking National Identity in the Age of Migration*, Council Statement from the 7th Plenary Meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012), www.migrationpolicy. org/research/TCM-rethinking-national-identity-council-statement.

2. ***Embed nondiscrimination into the DNA of the city.*** Combating discrimination has become second nature to many cities. For example, in Seattle, all spending decisions—down to fixing streetlights—are assessed for how they may (or may not) reduce disparities. While these anti-discrimination requirements can seem onerous and bureaucratic at first, as they become embedded into all city processes they will become more like reflex mechanisms.

3. ***Attend to the body language of city institutions.*** Whom the city employs sends an important message about what the city represents, and by extension its identity. To reduce the perception that there are insiders and outsiders, the municipal workforce must—at all levels—reflect the populations it serves. Only when minorities are well represented across city offices, from the police force to urban planning, will institutions and systems move on. In this regard, changes are best started from within.

4. ***Develop strategic partnerships.*** Citizenship is not merely about the relationship between the individual and the city, but emerges from a thriving civil society. Cities with mature civil societies and immigrant rights movements have benefited from listening to these parties' concerns. But partnerships with the private sector—a key element to success that goes well beyond jobs— remain all too rare. For partnerships with businesses to be sustainable (and not sidelined as corporate social responsibility work), cities need to create sufficient incentives for private actors to engage, and minimize the time commitments required.

5. ***Facilitate interaction through new technologies and urban design.*** While city authorities may not be able to address residential segregation effectively, urban planners can engineer spaces for different groups to interact. The "smart cities" movement provides plentiful opportunities to build cities that are more livable and responsive to the needs of residents. Likewise, the rise of smartphones and apps that open up public services to everyone and promote language learning enriches the toolbox for immigrant integration. Cities need to lay the groundwork for information and communication technology skills so that no one is left behind—while also monitoring the risks associated with new technologies.

6. ***Tap into existing infrastructure.*** Tools to facilitate everyday interactions between different groups are not being adequately tapped. Diverse communities can be a resource, not just a challenge. For example, the know-how of young people from minority backgrounds can be leveraged to help older people gain computer skills and access to services.

7. ***Prioritize socioeconomic outcomes.*** Greater cohesion is closely associated with improving outcomes for immigrant and minority groups. Cities should thus prioritize workforce development investments. In addition to perennially important investments in education and training, valuable programs include mentoring schemes, seed money for community-led initiatives, and drop-in services that explain business norms and city regulations to immigrant entrepreneurs.

8. ***See urban citizenship as a process rather than a status.*** It is reasonable to expect certain things of city residents, whatever their background. But cities can extract more from their citizens by way of persuasion and seduction than coercion. A good urban citizen is someone who participates in his or her own way, not someone who embodies certain criteria. Cities also need to learn to benefit from all the contributions their residents can offer.

9. ***Take diversity in stride and learn how to benefit from it.*** Abstract concepts like fostering a "welcoming culture" or "urban citizenship" can only do so much. To be effective, a diversity strategy has to be perceived as more than bureaucratic diktat and become part of the city's narrative, even folklore—for natives and newcomers alike. This is partly about branding: creative, appealing slogans such as Antwerp's "The city belongs to everyone" can seep into popular consciousness, as can public monuments and events celebrating immigration (New

York City provides a good example). Officials and the media must incorporate diversity in narratives about a city's history in order to strengthen appreciation for the different communities that consistently come together to make the city what it is today.

III. Conclusion

In the face of seismic demographic changes and global shifts, city identity is coming into its own. In theory, city identity can function as an on-ramp to full inclusion at the national level by being more readily accessible to new arrivals. It may even bridge the gap for temporary residents or those who choose not to become full members of their adopted country. But belonging at the local level can only ever be one point in the process, not the replacement for full inclusion at the national level.

For more on MPI's Transatlantic Council on Migration, visit:

www.migrationpolicy.org/transatlantic

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About the Author

Demetrios G. Papademetriou is Distinguished Senior Fellow and President Emeritus of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), a Washington-based think tank dedicated exclusively to the study of international migration. He is President of Migration Policy Institute Europe, a nonprofit, independent research institute in Brussels that aims to promote a better understanding of migration trends and effects within Europe.

He is the convener of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, which is composed of senior public figures, business leaders, and public intellectuals from Europe, the United States, and Canada, and convenes and codirects the Regional Migration Study Group, an initiative that has proposed and is promoting multistakeholder support for new regional and collaborative approaches to migration, competitiveness, and human-capital development for the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Central America.

Dr. Papademetriou has served as Chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Migration (2009-11); Chair of the Migration Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Director for Immigration Policy and Research at the U.S. Department of Labor and Chair of the Secretary of Labor's Immigration Policy Task Force; and Executive Editor of the *International Migration Review*.

He has published more than 270 books, articles, monographs, and research reports on a wide array of migration topics; lectures widely on all aspects of immigration and immigrant integration policy; and advises foundations and other grant-making organizations, civil-society groups, and senior government and political party officials in dozens of countries (including numerous European Union Member States while they hold the rotating EU presidency).

Dr. Papademetriou holds a PhD in comparative public policy and international relations (1976) from the University of Maryland and has taught at the universities of Maryland, Duke, American, and the New School for Social Research.

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The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

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