

Speech Lord Mayor Carola Gunnarsson

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Global Forum for Migration and Development GFMD European Consultation

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Allow me to start by thanking you all, particularly the UAE Chairmanship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, and the OECD as co-host of the Regional Consultation in Europe for being here today, discussing what is indeed a timely issue and one that is shaping our continent and our cities, and that will continue to do so in the future.

Migration flows have shaped our territories, and is a phenomenon that continuously shapes our towns, cities and regions. The growth, the evolution, and the development of Europe is inextricably linked to the people that come from all parts of the world.

European cities have been shaped by human mobility, which has demonstrated across history to be a sign of innovation, development and resilience. In Europe, the ongoing reluctance to South-North migration contrasts with the challenging demographic dynamics that put our local development at stake. This contradictory situation could be tackled through coherent and human-centered approaches to migration that imply all levels of governments and all stakeholders.

The current context, during and after the pandemic, has seen negative narratives exacerbated, with opportunistic speeches highlighting migrants and those most vulnerable as the culprits of the pandemic, or as those that will hinder the recovery.

Reality says otherwise: In Europe, migrant workers are disproportionately employed in precarious work and employment conditions, and have been more likely to need to keep working despite the risks of becoming ill, since their right to stay in the country where they live and work depends on their job. For undocumented migrant workers, meanwhile, who do not qualify for any social protection, sick pay or unemployment benefits are forced to keep working risking their health and that of those around them.

Local and regional governments are key to change the narrative on the phenomenon of migration. We understand migration as a status, not as nature. The shift to the current narrative that local governments can push is that migrants are neighbours that live in our city, that work in our city and that use the same public services as any other citizen. In this sense, we do not believe that migration is, in itself, a challenge, but rather a phenomenon that needs to be managed in a way that harnesses its full potential and enhances our communities.

It is our duty, also, to showcase how migrants can contribute to our local economic development. The role of the local fabric and administration is to support newcomers and enable them to contribute to the local economy.

Colleagues, we need to understand and take to heart the reality that migration is neither new nor reversible and that migration flows will increase in the coming years, with climate change and disasters being a key factor that need to be taken into account when managing migration.

Indeed, local and regional authorities have a crucial role in supporting migrants' inclusion and removing barriers to their contribution to the local fabric. The access to basic services is the starting point, but a strong coordination should be woven between all spheres of administration, in particular the national level, and the stakeholders at local, national and international level.

Global solutions require global frameworks that consider us partners and not simply implementers of measures bestowed upon us by national or supranational entities. Migration governance needs to build on the local sphere, and take into account our experiences and knowledge.

For this reason, in the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments, we are convinced that spaces like the Global Forum for Migration and Development are essential to overcome fearful and bordered-center approaches to migration that have

proven inefficient for countries and cities of origin, transit and destination.

I welcome and look forward to the celebration of this regional consultation at European level. I am convinced that by addressing Labour Migration in the Context of Changing Employment, Skilling Migrants for Employment and Fostering partnerships will help us enrich the conversation with new and complementary territorial perspectives.

The local elected representatives gathered around the Mayors Mechanism bear the responsibility of including new arrivals and promoting cohesion among all our neighbors despite limited resources and mandates. We are willing to contribute with our experiences from the ground to setting a new scenario that is more beneficial for us all.

We are not calling for confrontation with national governments in this matter; we are calling for acknowledgment as partners for development, and for our role in managing migration to be recognized. Our World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments is ready to contribute to achieve the recognition that we deserve in such an important issue for cities and for communities worldwide.

Thank you,