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Urban Migrant Inclusion and Refugee Protection – Volume 2

Global Perspectives of Sanctuary,
Solidarity, and Hospitality

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Editors

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and Hospitality

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 SOLI*CITY

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ISSN 2364-4087

ISSN 2364-4095 (electronic)

IMISCOE Research Series

ISBN 978-3-031-95150-3

ISBN 978-3-031-95151-0 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-95151-0>

This work was supported by IMISCOE

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Preface

The publication of this book is connected to the international *Soli*City* partnership (formally titled ‘Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective’). In the context of this international project, research teams located in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and North America have conducted a series of literature reviews that form the basis of several chapters. In addition, we asked project affiliates and scholars in our extended network to contribute chapters.

The result is a diverse team of contributing authors consisting of seasoned academics who are leading scholars on the topic of urban solidarity, sanctuary, and hospitality as well as up-and-coming early-career researchers. We strove to include authors from the Global South and Global North. Despite our efforts to create a diverse team of authors, the chapters were written mainly by academics and researchers affiliated with universities who tend to have the privilege and societal role to engage in research. While practitioners have valuable experiences and important insights to contribute to the debate, our experience has been that their time and capacities tend to be constrained by the lack of resources and—well—practical matters that have a real-world impact on the lives and well-being of migrants and refugees. While many chapter authors work closely with practitioners and draw on these practitioners’ expertise in asking the right research questions, the research was conducted and written up mainly by academics, which explains the underrepresentation of practitioners among the authors. We intended that this edited collection nevertheless contributes not only to scholarship but also assists such practitioners in their important work of improving the lives of migrants, refugees, and urban communities as a whole.

As we finalise the revisions of this edited collection, Donald Trump has made a comeback to the White House. We expect that the themes of urban sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality will attract further attention during his second presidency while American cities resist his administration’s anticipated anti-immigrant politics and policies. We hope, however, that the renewed attention to the United States will not distract from urban innovations of migrant integration and refugee protection elsewhere in the world. While recognising the importance of political developments

in the United States, this edited collection also serves to highlight the perspectives and experiences of urban migrant integration and refugee protection in the Global South.

Toronto and Accra
November 2024

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Acknowledgments

We thank Omar Lujan and Bridget Collrin who have worked tirelessly as the *Soli*City* Project Manager and Project Coordinator and thus contributed enormously to laying the foundation for this book. *Soli*City* team members Vida Carranza Capote, Charlene Smith, and Leo Ayala Mejia helped with important editorial work. We thank the series editor Anna Triandafyllidou and her colleague Irina Isaakyan at the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration and IMISCOE, as well as the Springer team consisting of Evelien Bakker, Bernadette Deelen-Mans, Prasad Gurunadham and Keertika Arul. Thanks to Diane Shugart for copyediting both volumes.

Resources from the *Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective* project have been made available to help publish the two volumes in open-access formats. We thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for funding this project.

Introduction

All cities are the product of migration, either international or internal. Correspondingly, urban communities tend to have an inclusive approach towards membership that is reflected in the statements and actions of urban leaders around the world. In the United States, Tom Cochran, the CEO and Executive Director of The United States Conference of Mayors, remarked in response to the Biden administration's announcement of extending the Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans: 'Mayors recognise the invaluable contributions immigrants have made to our cities and our nation. They continue to be an integral part of our communities and play a critical role in the strength of our economy' (Durr, 2023). In South Africa, the Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town, whose mission is to 'welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate, people on the move into local communities', stepped up in support of unlawfully detained asylum seekers by taking legal action with the help of Lawyers for Human Rights against South African's Department of Home Affairs in May 2024 (Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town, 2024). Meanwhile, the Mayor of Bogota, Columbia, Carlos Fernando Galán, proclaimed: 'Cities are often the first point of contact for migrants and require more support both nationally and internationally. It is crucial that cities have a voice in migration policies to provide the best possible care to those seeking a new home' (Bogota, 2024).

These are just three of countless examples of urban leaders, administrations, and civic-society organisations treating international migration as a normal human activity. In contrast, nation-states (and state-like configurations such as the European Union) treat migration as a problem. They seek to control cross-border mobility and, through migration policy, select who is permitted to traverse the border and under what circumstances, and who is denied entry. In fact, controlling human migration and keeping displaced people out of the country has become one of the most prominent global policy issues and goals in recent years.

Every year, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) releases their latest estimates on the brutality and deadly nature of states' and state assemblages' efforts to control human migration at their external borders. In 2023 alone, 3041 people died or went missing trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea in their attempt to reach Europe; 1200 died or went missing in the Americas; 1844 in Africa; and

1180 in Asia (International Organization for Migration, 2024). Although these estimates are based on diverse yet credible sources, many instances may never be recorded or known; the actual numbers of fatalities and people gone missing are therefore likely to be much higher. Those migrants and refugees who survive the journey often see their rights being taken away and face incarceration, social and political exclusion, dehumanisation, and the exploitation of their labour. Migration regimes have become increasingly repressive and nation-states—especially those of the Global North—are failing to uphold their own self-proclaimed human rights standards and principles of human security and dignity.

Recently, the United Nations' Global Compact for Migration and Refugees sought to coordinate international efforts and meet standards of human and other universal rights and responsibility-sharing while not challenging the sovereignty of nation-states to control cross-border movements. Many problems related to the denial of rights and the social, economic, and political marginalisation of migrants and refugees have their root cause in the insistence of states to exercise their sovereignty when it comes to controlling migration and refugee mobility (Bauder, 2022).

Urban Migrant Inclusion and Refugee Protection shifts the focus of attention onto cities. It addresses especially how municipalities and urban communities deal with inhabitants who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances because they are migrants or refugees. In Canada and the United States, the so-called sanctuary cities have focused on protecting and supporting people living without or with precarious national status (Atienza, 2023; Bauder, 2017; Casellas & Wallace, 2020). In the United Kingdom, there is a 'cities of sanctuary' movement. In Europe, cities that support disenfranchised migrants and refugees have called themselves city of refuge, safe harbours, solidarity cities, and other names (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019a; Christoph & Kron, 2019; SEEBRÜCKE, 2019). Cities in Latin America collaborate with the United Nations on a programme called *Ciudades Solidarias*, or solidarity cities (Godoy & Bauder, 2021; Thayer Correa et al., 2014). Formal municipal policies may be less common (or less known in the English-language literature) in Africa and Asia but initiatives and practices exist at the urban community and civil-society levels to support migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations (Bauder, 2019; Kassa, 2019; Missbach et al., 2018). These urban initiatives and practices have in common that they seek to include all inhabitants irrespective of their legal status and migration circumstances and facilitate migrants' and refugees' participation in urban life and politics.

Urban initiatives and practices of migrant inclusion and refugee protection are obviously affected by regional and national circumstances. For example, the flight of people from political crises, disasters, and conflicts in Haiti, Lebanon, Sudan, or Venezuela disproportionately affects transit and destination cities in the corresponding world region or hemisphere. National legal and governance systems also shape cities' capacities to offer protection. In countries like Germany, where a central population registry exists, remaining undetected by state authorities is much harder than in, say, the United States, where non-status populations may easier remain hidden from authorities. A population registry also exists in Spain, but municipalities can use it as proof of residency to provide services to non-status populations

(Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018). In some African countries, where state bureaucracies are less developed, national legal status or citizenship may not matter much to gaining access to employment, housing, and basic services. In different national settings, cities are also given different powers vis-à-vis regional and national governments. Larger cities in the United States control their own police forces that can be included in municipal policies of non-cooperation with national immigration enforcement authorities. In Canada, municipal police forces are guided not by municipal but by provincial legislation. In other countries, such as Chile, municipalities do not possess their own police forces (Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018; Hershkowitz et al., 2021).

Despite these different circumstances, cities around the world are stepping up and tackling the problem of migrant and refugee exclusion. On the one hand, they approach this matter with problem-solving pragmatism (Barber, 2013); on the other, they take a more principled social justice lens (Purcell, 2006), focus on democracy (Frick, 2023), and revolutionary spirit (Harvey, 2012). The two volumes of this collection assume a global perspective and examine empirical contexts in both the Global North and the Global South. The chapters show that urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection are a global phenomenon.

The current literature on urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection, however, focuses disproportionately on the Global North. In the Global South, this topic has received less attention. The relatively few studies of the Global South that do address the subject matter tend to apply concepts and ideas that were developed in the Global North (Bauder, 2019; Godoy & Bauder, 2021; Kassa, 2019; Missbach et al., 2018). An opportunity exists not only for research from the Global South to contribute to the debate of urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection but especially to develop an integrative perspective that connects urban policies and practices in different parts of the world and throughout historical periods.

An overarching idea framing this book is that there is a distinctly urban approach that differs from that generally assumed by nation-states towards migration and refugees. This urban approach revolves around the concepts of sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality. The term *sanctuary* often refers to a range of local policies and practices related to migrants and refugees in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In Canada and the United States, ‘sanctuary cities’ seek to offer migrants and refugees without or with precarious legal status protection and access to municipal services. Not all ‘sanctuary cities’ are embracing the term. Critics argue that local policies cannot provide full protection, i.e., sanctuary, from national migration enforcement authorities; some municipal administrations and policymakers seek to avoid the political fallout of using the term (Bauder, 2017). In the United Kingdom, the City of Sanctuary movement ‘promotes a culture of hospitality towards those taking sanctuary’ (Squire & Bagelman, 2012, p. 155) but does not have the same focus on legal protection as sanctuary cities in Canada and the United States. Several chapters of this collection apply the term ‘sanctuary’ to urban policies and practices beyond Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom (e.g. Bambach, Chap. 2, this volume; Stefoni, Bravo, and Stang, Chap. 1, this volume; Drejer-Jensen and Jørgensen, Chap. 9, this volume).

The concept of *solidarity* has been widely applied in research, activism, and politics related to migrants and refugees (Agustín, 2020; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019b; Bauder, 2022). While it generally refers to social connections fostering unity among people with similar interests or goals, the use and application of the concept in migration and refugee research are complex and variable. Migration and refugee scholars have uncovered various ‘sources’ (Oosterlynck et al., 2016) and philosophical underpinnings of solidarity (Bauder & Juffs, 2020), distinguishing between autonomous, civic, and institutional solidarity (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016). Furthermore, solidarity is not only relational but can also be transformative and creative (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). Cities and urban initiatives in different regions of the world have adopted the label of solidarity to describe their transformative political goals (Christoph & Kron, 2019; Godoy & Bauder, 2021; Jørgensen & Agustín, 2019; Özdemir, 2022).

While the state and municipal administrations promote solidarity in a top-down manner, migrants and refugees often initiate solidarity practices themselves. Africa, for example, is known for its associational lifestyles, with associations typically forming along the lines of ethnic, religious, professional, and national communities that support the integration of new entrants and their members (Quartey et al., 2020). Some of these associations have frequent meetings to discuss the well-being of their members and serve as networks that link migrants and refugees to jobs and accommodation, provide them with access to information, and organise programmes that help them maintain their culture in the urban areas (Setrana et al., Chap. 9, volume 1; Setrana & Okyerefo, 2024). These associations not only provide solidarity spaces for migrants and refugees, but their leaders also promote the interests of their members at local and national levels.

Hospitality is a social practice that is widely used throughout the world. Nevertheless, it has been theorised mostly from a Eurocentric scholarly perspective. The European geographer and philosopher Immanuel Kant posited that strangers have a right to hospitality on foreign lands but that this hospitality is restricted and does not entitle to permanent settlement (Kant, 1795). Jacques Derrida (2001) has critiqued the state-centric logic of Kant’s ideas of hospitality and instead frames this concept in reference to cities and the arrival of refugees. Framing hospitality at the urban scale makes the concept applicable to this edited collection (e.g. Bauder, Chap. 1, volume 1). Derrida also reminds us, however, that the concept of hospitality must be viewed critically as it implies uneven relations and access to resources between host and guest, and that it connects to hostility (Derrida, 2000, 2001). The tension and conflict between host population and migrants cannot be underestimated within the concept of hospitality. Beyond access to resources, conflicts sometimes originate from regional protocols and national laws. For example, there is ongoing friction between Ghanaian and Nigerian retail traders because the laws of Ghana prevent foreigners from investing in the retail sector. Although Ghanaians are generally hospitable, the concept of hospitality as critically reflected in this book has its limits and must be interrogated from a multi-level perspective.

The possibility of a distinct urban approach towards migrant inclusion and refugee protection involving the concepts of sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality does

not mean that there is a uniform experience among cities and urban communities. Apart from national and regional differences, there is an enormous variety of policies and practices among different urban actors in support of migrants and refugees. The chapters in this collection highlight the range and importance of such actors. They include national, regional, and local governments (Colbern, Chap. 4, volume 1; Kuge and Anders, Chap. 10, volume 1; Pekşen and Kurtarır, Chap. 10, this volume); supra-national organisations like the United Nations (Stefoni et al., Chap. 1, this volume; Bambach, Chap. 2, this volume, Janina Stürner-Siovit and Morthorst, Chap. 3, this volume); ethnic and neighbourhood communities (Lujan, Chap. 6, volume 1; Baro, Chap. 7, volume 1); faith-based and civic-society movements and organisations (Arnold, Chap. 12, volume 1; Koskimaki and Mazani, Chap. 4, this volume; Salifu and Jørgensen, Chap. 5, this volume; Drejer-Jensen and Jørgensen, Chap. 9, this volume); businesses and entrepreneurs (Lemke, Chap. 13, this volume), informal migrant networks (Setrana et al., Chap. 9, volume 1); global urban networks (Agustín and Jørgensen, Chap. 11, this volume); and activists and street protesters (Steinhilper and Sommer, Chap. 7, this volume).

While many cities and urban actors are supportive of migrant inclusion and refugee protection, xenophobia and migrant and refugee exclusion and scapegoating for societal problems such as unemployment, poverty, crime, and overcrowding are also rampant in many metropolitan areas. Cities are complex assemblages where diverging interests and positions are negotiated; they are 'battlegrounds' of refuge and migration policy (Ambrosini, 2021). Correspondingly, neither all cities nor all voices within cities are supportive of migrant inclusion and refugee protection. A universal urban approach, therefore, has been difficult to theorise.

An additional difficulty of theorising such an urban approach is that urban and migration theories are often developed in the Global North and then treated as universal and inappropriately applied to contexts of the Global South (Landau, 2010; Landau & Bakewell, 2018). For example, the primacy of the Westphalian state framing migration politics in the Global North (Torpey, 1999) cannot always be taken for granted in contexts like Africa, where statehood may 'not represent liberal democratic contracts between "citizens" and the political establishment' (Kassa, 2019, p. 68). Many African states have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, and both national state and local municipal government structures may be legally and politically weak as well as under-resourced (Haysom, 2013). Loren Landau (2010, p. 176) suggests that 'an effective, centralised authority has rarely governed the continent's urban centres.' In addition, the established relations between labour and capital that form the bedrock of urban theory developed in the Global North, such as the Lefebvrian idea of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996), do not always apply in the cities of the Global South (Landau, 2019). Furthermore, the assumption embedded in migration and urban theories that migrants and refugees are here to stay and make a city their permanent home is based on the experience of settler-colonial countries of the Global North and may not hold in the Global South where migrant populations are often transient and less committed to 'integrate' into presumably pre-existing urban and national communities (Kassa, 2019; Kihato, 2010).

To develop an understanding of urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection from decentred and local geographical perspectives resonates with recent calls to decolonise migration studies (Collins, 2022). Such calls connect with a literature that draws attention to the legacies of European imperialism (Humphris, 2022; Mongia, 2018; Walia, 2021) and increasingly includes studies on the situation of migrants and refugees in cities of the Global South (Cohen et al., 2022; Kassa, 2019; Kihato, 2007; Missbach et al., 2018). The chapters in this collection contribute to these efforts by highlighting the role of both the urban and locally situated knowledges in structuring the experiences of migrants and refugees.

The focus on urban communities, however, should not be interpreted as a romanticisation of these experiences (Purcell, 2006). In many ways, urban communities may not be different from hegemonic and oppressive national communities. How migration and refugee mobility are governed in a global system of supposedly sovereign states is steeped in neocolonial and racist practice, codified into international law and agreements, and effectively perpetuates a system of ‘global apartheid’ (Jørgensen & Schierup, n.d.; Sharma, 2005; van Houtum, 2010) and global ‘fortress capitalism’ (Georgi, 2019). Cities are important participants in this repressive global system (Sassen, 1996).

However, cities also differ from nation-states in that nation-states are entirely political constructs; they are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991) because the vast majority of members never personally or physically interact with each other. Furthermore, there is typically no tangible pre-existing community that defines national belonging, membership, or territory. Conversely, cities (as well as towns and villages) define concrete physical communities and places where people interact as neighbours, sit next to each other on the bus on their way to work, attend school council meetings, pray together at their local mosque, temple, church, or other places of worship, participate in community events, and share the stands at their local soccer, cricket, or baseball games. These personal connections lay the foundation for solidarity and for offering hospitality and sanctuary (Bauder, 2022). Cities are the places where migrants and refugees participate in economic and social life, and where they develop a sense of belonging. In turn, many urban municipalities and communities protect and include newcomers and inhabitants who are denied legal status or rendered vulnerable in other ways by nation-states and global migration regimes (Boudou, 2019).

This book’s main objective is to examine urban and local policies and practices that have existed in different parts of the world and which foster inclusion and participation of migrants and refugees in vulnerable legal, political, and social situations. The book also challenges Eurocentric universal ideas and conceptions of terms such as solidarity, sanctuary, or hospitality and emphasises local contexts that give voice to migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations. We are, however, still a far way from being able to leverage local and regional knowledge systems from the Global South as well as Indigenous epistemologies to decolonise scholarly perspectives of urban solidarity and inform hands-on local practices and policies towards refugees and vulnerable migrants. Nevertheless, we hope that this book contributes to steering debate and practice in this direction.

Contributions

Urban Migrant Inclusion and Refugee Protection provides the most comprehensive and original resource yet available on this topic. There have been outstanding books on this topic that offer points of connection (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019b; Bagelman, 2016; Christoph & Kron, 2019; Darling & Bauder, 2019; Stürner-Siovitz, 2022). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no other book available at present that involves the geographical range, methodological diversity, and interdisciplinary variability of work included in this edited collection.

There are several key aspects that make this edited collection stand out. The first relates to the comprehensiveness of *Urban Migrant Inclusion and Refugee Protection* that makes it an important resource and guide for a wide-ranging audience of scholars and practitioners worldwide. This aspect illustrates the complexity of urban policies and practices towards migrant inclusion and refugee protection. These policies and practices are embedded in diverse national, regional, historical, and geopolitical contexts and are the product of continuously changing political interests, negotiations of identities and frames of belonging, and claiming of rights.

Second, the book offers theoretical advances, generally assuming critical and postcolonial perspectives in relation to rights, urban policies, politics, and practices; understandings of scale and space; and the exploration of emerging thematic frontiers. Theory continues to be disproportionately developed in the Global North and applied in the Global South (Bauder, 2019; Collins, 2022; Landau, 2010; Landau & Bakewell, 2018; Squire, 2022). While our book cannot single-handedly reverse the direction of knowledge flows, the chapters reflect critically on the centralisation of theoretical knowledge production by the West. Generally, the book pursues anti-colonial aims by critiquing neocolonial politics in migration governance and tendencies in migration and refugee scholarship. The book decentres knowledge production by including local strategies and perspectives on solidarity, sanctuary, and hospitality.

Third, a particular strength of this book is the empirical advances it offers. These draw on a wide variety of methodological approaches ranging from archival research and policy analyses of government data to comprehensive literature reviews in regions that have been neglected in the study of urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection. The chapters not only examine urban policies and practices by focusing on the local scale but also on how these policies and practices connect to national and regional politics and international city networks. In this way, the book offers a multi-layered global perspective of urban migrant solidarity and refugee protection.

Audience

The book assumes an international and interdisciplinary approach to sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality towards migrants and refugees. The combination of the Global North and Global South perspectives makes it of interest to a global

audience. It appeals to readers in the immigrant-receiving countries of both the Global North and the Global South, which have been underserved in respect of scholarly research on this topic. The open-access format ensures that the book is available to audiences who may not be able to afford the print version. The free availability of the material is important to us especially since readers and institutions in the Global South are often unable to buy the book; it would be hypocritical if our book supported the flow of capital from readers in the Global South to the publisher located in the Global North. In addition, we believe that knowledge should be free, independently of the location and circumstances of the audience. A print version is still available for purchase from the publisher for readers who prefer holding a physical copy in their hands. To add to the book's accessibility the authors of the chapters have made every effort to write in accessible language to include readers whose native tongue is not English or who may not be familiar with academic jargon.

With these efforts, we seek to appeal to policymakers at international and municipal institutions, urban planners, migration and refugee practitioners, human rights activists, and social justice advocates. Despite these efforts, however, we realise that the book's main audience will likely consist of academics, researchers, graduate students, and advanced undergraduate students in diverse disciplines such as Anthropology, Geography, Sociology, Political Science, and fields such as citizenship studies, critical borders studies, legal studies, migration studies, political movement studies, social justice studies, refugee studies, and urban studies.

Each chapter has its own list of references so that it can be assigned separately as reading in upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses at institutions of higher education around the world. To serve as a stand-alone course reading, we recognise that some repetition and overlapping material—for example with respect to explaining common concepts and ideas—may exist between chapters.

Structure of the Book

Urban Migrant Inclusion and Refugee Protection is organised into two volumes. There are simply too many chapters to fit into a single volume. We grouped the chapters into seven parts that each address a particular thematic issue, arranging these parts in a way that each volume offers a different perspective on the overall topic of urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection.

Despite the thematic organisation into two volumes, we intend for this work to be read as one coherent collection addressing issues with urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection. Therefore, we wrote one general Introduction covering both volumes. For each volume, however, we wrote two separate 'outlines' in which we discuss and introduce the different parts in each volume. Thus, following this introduction, we provide an Outline of Volume 1; Volume 2 begins with its own outline.

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Outline of Volume 2

Volume 1 critiques the Eurocentrism entrenched in research on urban migrant inclusion and refugee protection and shows that urban sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality policies and practices exist throughout the world. From the previous literature, however, readers might gain the impression that such initiatives are mostly a phenomenon of the Global North. Sanctuary cities such as New York, San Francisco, and Toronto, and prominent migrant- and refugee-supporting European cities such as Barcelona, Berlin, and Palermo have received disproportionate attention among scholars and commentators.

Volume 2 seeks to correct this distorted picture and offer global perspectives of urban sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality. This second volume therefore begins with Part I, ‘Regional Perspectives’, which presents research that introduces urban solidarity policies and practices mostly as a phenomenon that exists across Africa and Latin America. An important purpose of the chapters in Part I is to fill a gap of knowledge of policies and practices in the Global South. In the opening chapter, Carolina Stefoni, Aline Bravo, and Maria Fernanda Stang present the results of a documentary review on urban sanctuary and solidarity in Latin America’s Southern Cone and highlight the differences to corresponding policies and practices in the Global North. In the next chapter, Matías Fouillieux Bambach conducted a similar review of urban practices towards refugees in Central America, a region characterised, on the one hand, by large-scale displacement, and, on the other, by the dominance of the United States as a political force of migrant and refugee attraction. In Chap. 3, Janina Stürner-Siovit and Lasse Juhl Morthorst shift the focus of attention to medium-size African cities and examine multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring together policy actors at local, national, and international levels. In Chap. 4, Leah Koskimaki and Perfect Mazani review the literature on urban migrant and refugee solidarity in South Africa and find that local grassroots actors and religious communities offer solidarity in an effort to compensate for the absence of government protections and supports. In the final chapter of Part I, Mashudu Salifu and Martin Bak Jørgensen connect the perspective focused on the Global South with the Global North by comparing solidarity initiatives in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Accra, Ghana. Their research reveals structural communalities regarding the role of

civil society and municipal actors despite rather different geographical and geopolitical contexts.

That urban initiatives of migrant inclusion and refugee protection exist in the Global North and the Global South does not mean that these initiatives take place under similar circumstances. In fact, economic, demographic, geopolitical, political, and social conditions differ substantially in different countries and world regions. And yet, despite these geographical differences, there are common patterns among urban communities in how they seek to include and envision migrants and refugees to belong, and how they enact policies and rights of urban sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality.

Part II contains chapters that discuss the tension between the urban inclusion and exclusion of migrants and refugees in various national contexts. City autonomy can go both ways: it can enable urban communities and governments to be inclusive and welcoming to newcomers; or it can give cities the authority to put in place policies and measures to marginalise, exclude, and reject migrants and refugees. Using Berlin and Hamburg in Germany as case studies, Mouna Maaroufi and Helge Schwiertz examine in Chap. 6 how local regimes of migration control and pro-migrant solidarity are highly ambivalent and fragmented. Also in Germany, Elias Steinhilper and Moriz Sommer examine two mid-size cities that have taken different paths: one embracing migrants and meeting them with solidarity, the other staging anti-migrant protests. In Chap. 8, Benjamin Bruce and Line Crettex investigate how in the Greater Los Angeles region in the United States irregular migrants gain access to healthcare and public services and how this access varies with jurisdictions' different attitudes, ranging from hospitable to hostile towards irregular migrants. In the final chapter of Part II, Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen and Martin Bak Jørgensen offer a gender perspective of sanctuary related to the differential treatment of migrant women in the context of Mexico City.

The final part of this collection focuses on policies, politics, and rights of urban sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality. In Chap. 10, Mert Pekşen and Erhan Kurtarr examine the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in Turkey and the strategic invisibility of migrant and refugee support and solidarity infrastructure in light of Turkey's hierarchical refugee governance structure. Chapter 11 by Sofia Ntaliou focuses on Athens, Greece, to demonstrate how this city's unique circumstances have shaped its guest-resident approach towards migrant and refugee inclusion. In Chap. 12, Judith K. Bernhard, Julie E.E. Young, and Luin Goldring examine precarious-status families with children in Toronto, Canada, and observe that urban sanctuary policies often fail to protect and offer basic rights to children who suffer from the illegalisation of their parents. The final chapter by Tara Carr-Lemke connects the literatures of immigrant entrepreneurship and urban sanctuary in the United States and highlights the politics of cultural liaison work for migrant-owned enterprises.

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Part I

Regional Perspectives

Chapter 1

Urban Solidarity and Mobilities in the Latin American Southern Cone: Local Experiences in Global Debates



Carolina Stefoni , Aline Bravo , and Maria Fernanda Stang

1.1 Introduction

Sanctuary cities in countries like Canada and the United States seek to offer protection spaces for refugee populations and people with irregular immigration status. While presenting important differences in their objectives, strategies, and practices, these cities have established legal and administrative frameworks that underpin a series of sanctuary actions with a certain independence from measures and policies adopted in the national government (Bauder, 2017).

The countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America do not have any experiences with sanctuary cities. However, there are Solidarity Cities that have been directly tied to the proposals created by the Mexico Action Plan (PAM 2004), 20 years after the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984). This Plan is based on the importance assigned to local territories for including and integrating migrant and refugee populations arriving in a country. The Mexico Action Plan was reaffirmed in the Brazil Declaration (2014) for the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984). In addition, there are other initiatives driven by intergovernmental interests, such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR for its Spanish initials) that seek to uphold the relevance of cities and local governments for designing programmes and defining inclusive policies for migrant populations. One example is the Mercocities Programme (Mercociudades) implemented in 1995.

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To understand the impact of these initiatives, the literature review allowed us to identify experiences of municipalities, city governments, and social organisations in the provision of services, information, and access to rights for migrants and refugees. Both the Solidarity Cities and the Mercocities have network initiatives, although these are promoted by international agencies such as UNHCR. In turn, the initiatives promoted by local governments lack coordination with each other, often face limited budgets, and end up depending on the political will of authorities (Thayer et al., 2020).

In their review on urban solidarity initiatives within Latin America, Margaret Godoy and Harald Bauder (2021) concluded that there is a gap between initiatives emerging ‘from above’ and ‘from below’, i.e., from local governments and civil society. They argue that this gap has not been analysed by the literature. However, this gap may also correspond to real differences in the structure of urban solidarity initiatives in the Southern Cone that cannot be compared to the initiatives of Global North such as sanctuary cities.

To understand the development of Solidarity Cities, Mercocities, and other local initiatives to promote and protect migrants’ and refugees’ human rights requires understanding the context of refugee and migration policies within the subregion. Blanca Garcés-Mascreñas and Kristin Eitel (2019) indicated that sanctuary cities (referring to cases in northern countries) were created in opposition and reaction to policies and politics defined in the national setting. Following the same argument, we understand that local responses to refugees and irregular migration in the Southern Cone are inscribed within a broader context given by national and subregional policy towards migrants and refugee movements.

After the countries of the Southern Cone returned to democracy, progress was made towards agreements to favour mobility and residence for the citizens of these countries. The agreement on Residency for Nationals of State Parties between Mercosur, Bolivia, and Chile (2002) and subsequently extended to Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru was a milestone in facilitating mobility for migrants in the region (OIM, 2018). Latin America has also been recognised for its tradition in asylum and its role in the protection of refugee status (Barichello, 2016), specifically since the Cartagena Declaration (1984), which broadened the criteria of recognising a person as a refugee. Together with the Mexico Action Plan (2004) and the Brazil Action Plan (2014), these instruments had a significant impact on national regulations pertaining to migration and refugee status. The Mercosur agreement led to people from the Southern Cone having, until recently, a relatively simple set of mechanisms for regular migration within the region. The Cartagena agreement generated the incorporation of high standards for the protection of human rights of the refugee population by Latin American states. However, Leiza Brumat et al. (2018) indicate that this openness to mobility and the protection of refugees has faced implementation difficulties due to, among other things, the weaknesses in coordination among different state bodies as well as a lack of resources. We thus argue that the initiatives implemented by the Solidarity Cities, Mercocities, and various local government initiatives have mainly aimed to support deficits in social inclusion, rather than

becoming spaces of active or passive resistance to national migration policies of security and control.

In this context, we ask why the experiences of solidarity cities, Mercocities, and local initiatives in the Southern Cone take on a character that differs from the sanctuary cities which have developed in countries of the Global North. We propose that, in the case of the Southern Cone, these local experiences are constructed as a montage that allows for the convergence between the objectives of international organisations under the United Nations (mainly the UNHCR, which is the UN agency for refugees, and the International Organization for Migration, IOM), Mercosur, the assorted national governments, and local initiatives. Our hypothesis is that the convergence between these institutional levels is possible based on two elements. One, the subregion was able to move forward with mechanisms oriented towards favouring mobility and the regular entry of migrants after the return of democracy and before the punitive turn of recent years. Existing institutions, however, have impeded the process of economic, social, and political inclusion for migrants. Two, the sub-regional level has an important tradition of protecting asylum seekers and refugees, facilitating this level's social and political legitimacy until the punitive turn of recent years. This legitimacy was conducive for a relatively coherent discourse on migrant and refugee protection and inclusion between various local, national, and supranational bodies. Thus, the development of Solidarity Cities and Mercocities has mainly been aimed to favour social and cultural inclusion of migrants and refugees rather than to resist or countermand central government measures and policies towards refugees or migratory entry.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first, we briefly review the definitions of sanctuary cities in the light of experiences in the United States and Europe, and describe the Solidarity City and Mercocities programmes. The second section reviews concrete experiences in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, including Solidarity Cities and Mercocities, along with some local initiatives developed by city governments. In the third section, we analyse migratory and refugee policies in the region to understand the context from which the Solidarity Cities initiatives have emerged. Finally, the fourth section presents our conclusions and reflections.

1.2 Methodology

We conducted a documentary review methodology based on a corpus of official documents from international organisms, government institutions and local governments, academic articles, and press notes. Searches were conducted using Google Scholar, Scopus, and Crossref, while non-academic literature was consulted via Google and directly from official institutions' websites, with the search terms employed being drawn from the keywords used by Godoy and Bauder (2021), namely solidarity, inclusion, and integration. The documents were used to build a database, organised with the Zotero reference manager. The data was then transferred into Excel to perform analysis on the themes of *sanctuary cities*; *migration*

and refuge; international welcoming programmes, and local welcoming programmes. In general terms, the study covers background information dating to the 1980s but focuses on the practices and welcoming initiatives identified since the 2000s.

1.3 Sanctuary Cities and Solidarity Cities: Any Common Ground?

In countries of the Global North, sanctuary cities have been innovative responses to exclusionary national migratory policies. Their main goal has been to accommodate refugees and undocumented immigrants in the local context of the city (Bauder, 2017; Garcés & Eitel, 2019; Fouillieux Bambach, Chap. 2, this volume). Experiences in the United States and Europe have presented important nuances. Garcés & Eitel (2019) indicated that in the United States, the main purpose has been to protect undocumented workers living in these cities. In Europe, there has been an important shift since the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, when sanctuary cities arose as spaces to handle a recently arrived population and denounce the neglect from national policies and the European Union in this regard. The actions deployed by these cities aimed to create protection and support spaces for the migrant and refugee population and try to produce a more inclusive idea of the local level, contrasting with the securitisation discourses and control and exclusion measures by central governments.

Michael Blake (2021) identified two sanctuary city models. According to the first, the city takes a position contrary to the central government that materialises in disobedience towards national laws. This model applies to various sanctuary cities in the United States, especially with what Cruz (2019) identified as the ‘new migratory movement’. Initially, the sanctuary city concept in the United States was oriented towards Central American refugees and had a compassionate focus for migration (Bender & Arrocha, 2017, in Cruz, 2019; Fouillieux Bambach, Chap. 2, this volume); later, the ‘new sanctuary movement’ shifted the focus towards non-criminalisation of people with irregular migration status (Cruz, 2019). The second model identified by Blake (2021) consists of cases where the city stands up as a resistance space against federal negligence and poor decisions, as in the case of Barcelona (García & Bak Jørgensen, 2019). Lambert & Swerts (2019) draw attention to the changes that can arise in the creation of sanctuary cities to the extent that new actors join in constructing agendas, as was the case in the Belgian city of Liège.

The Southern Cone has no equivalent experiences to the sanctuary cities. However, this region has developed so-called Solidarity Cities, as presented in the Mexico Action Plan (2004), in continuity with the 1984 Cartagena Declaration and the subsequent Brazil Action Plan, which presented three proposals geared towards strengthening protections for refugees and displaced people: ‘Solidarity Cities’, ‘Resettlement in Solidarity’, and ‘Solidarity Borders’. While we will focus on the

first proposal, these three initiatives work together to coordinate efforts to protect refugee populations’ rights.

The objective of the Solidarity Cities programme is ‘generating joint work plans, through identifying the needs which exist at the local level and the commitment from local governments to strengthen their work benefiting refugees and migrants living within these territories’ (UNHCR, 2022c). This programme is implemented via agreements between the UNHCR and local authorities and are usually ratified by city councils and maintained independently from changes in local administrations (UNHCR, 2021). As of April 2023, in South and Central America, 62 cities (or municipalities) and seven provinces had signed the agreement. The Southern Cone had 43 Solidarity Cities: 11 in Argentina, 13 in Chile (municipalities), 16 in Brazil, and three in Uruguay, together with four Argentine provinces and one Chilean region (Fig. 1.1).

Solidarity City encounters were carried out in Argentina and Uruguay during 2020, giving rise to the creation of Solidarity City Networks, with special participation from community associations, in addition to local governments and the UNHCR. In Chile, there was a national consultation in 2021 that brought together the 12 municipalities comprising the network to review challenges and strengths

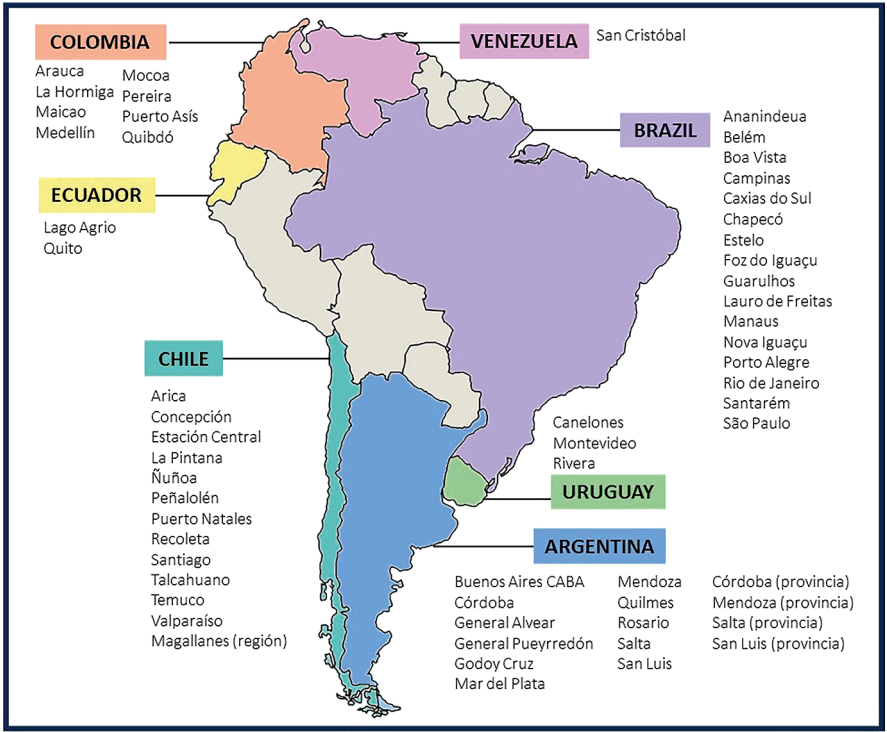


Fig. 1.1 Cities, regions and provinces members of the ‘Cities of Solidarity’ programme in South America by 2023

regarding the economic integration of refugees and migrants. This encounter was also used to share best practices and strengthen networking among local governments. In Brazil, no cooperation agreements were created with particular municipalities; instead, there is an annual 'Report on Solidarity Cities in Brazil: Local-level protection and integration for refugees' (UNHCR, 2022a).

Another initiative seeking to articulate local practices at the international level is the Mercocities (Nicolao, 2022), a network of local governments created in 1995 establishing mission to 'Strengthen regional identity and integration to ensure the development of cities and wellbeing in South America' (Mercociudades (s.f.), n.d.). The network initially consisted of 12 member cities and as of 2023, it has 375 member cities from ten countries of South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The network operates via different commissions. Originally one was the Human Rights Commission, which tangentially addressed migratory issues. However, since 2011 the mobility of people began to gain more visibility within this commission, leading it to change its name to the Committee on Human Rights and Migration. The agenda proposed for the 2020–2023 period was to promote human rights as a working axis for the network and to exchange best practices on human rights and immigration matters, both internally and with other networks; promote the integration of network member cities into the Latin American and Caribbean Coalition against Racism, Discrimination, and Xenophobia; and to build a dynamic space for exchange and dialogue about local realities regarding human rights and the migrant population, with a focus on the intersections of gender and poverty. Julieta Nicolao (2022) analysed the treatment of the immigration question in the Mercocities, identifying strategies and activities that have taken place to consolidate the 2020–2023 agenda. However, she maintains that there is little effective participation by Latin American cities regarding this thematic unit, which includes only 14 municipalities of the network's 375 Mercociudades.

Solidarity Cities and Mercocities converged in December 2022. During the 27th Mercociudades Summit in Montevideo, the UNHCR and the Mercocities Network signed a covenant to facilitate the incorporation of local governments participating in Mercocities into the Solidarity Cities initiative. According to the UNHCR (2023, p. 2), this agreement sought to 'promote the Exchange of best practices between local governments, built capacities, and facilitate consciousness among functionaries.' Below, we review the implementation of these programmes in three countries of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) and, where relevant, mention some local initiatives aimed at promoting the rights of the refugees and asylum seekers.

1.4 Initiatives in Southern Cone Cities

1.4.1 Argentina

Some Argentinian cities participated in the Solidarity Cities programme based on their membership in the Thematic Unit on Human Rights and Migrations from Mercocities or by joining the UNHCR programme on Solidarity Cities. Córdoba is one such case, taking part at both the provincial and municipal government levels, showing growing levels of institutionalisation in the protection and promotion of migrants' human rights (Nicolao, 2020, 2022). Córdoba was a founding member of Mercocities, leading different activities and proposing that the Human Rights and Migration Commission should have Thematic Unit status, which it presided over for the 2022–2023 period (Nicolao, 2022). Under its leadership, and due to the municipality's participation in the UNHCR Solidarity City network in Argentina, in March 2022 the Care Center for Migrant and Refugee Persons (CAPEM) was inaugurated with the objective of 'providing an information service, support assessment, training, orientation, and a space to promote interculturality, from an integral perspective of promoting and accessing rights, to guarantee *effective insertion in the city* for this population sector'¹ (CAPEM, n.d.). Apart from offering advice for migration paperwork, job training, and education, CAPEM focuses on campaigns to raise awareness on migration in the Córdoba community and actions tied with migrant organisations.

Mendoza also participates in the UNHCR Solidarity Cities programme at provincial and local scales. Locally, participation began in November 2021. Based on the respective cooperation covenant, commitments were established to guarantee protection and socioeconomic inclusion for populations of interest to UNHCR, incorporating them into local government programmes. The intercultural dialogue round table met in May 2022 and May 2023 with associations and organisations to promote the rights of migrant people and to propose actions favouring broader rights for and integration of migrant communities.

Argentina also has a civil society initiative called Community Refugee Patronage. The objective of this network of civil society organisations² is providing information to facilitate local community sponsorship, particularly under the Syria Program of the Argentine State (Patrocinio Comunitario, n.d.).

These three cases are initiatives marked by orientations arising from international organisations (UNHCR) and responding to the main guidelines of these schemes: document regularisation, for both immigrants and refugees, and actions

¹ Own translation and emphasis.

² ADRA, Action for displaced Syrians, AMAL Argentina, Blue Rose Compass, CAREF, Corredor Humanitario SANT'EGIDIO, Esclavas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, JUCUM, Manos Abiertas, with the support of the UNHCR, the IOM, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), and Amnesty International.

aimed at the integration within local communities, with an emphasis on labour inclusion.

1.4.2 *Chile*

The Solidarity Cities programme has been active since its beginning in this country. There are currently 13 municipalities and one region involved (UNHCR, 2023). The participating cities are committed to four central tasks: incorporating the refugee and migrant population into the municipalities' social programmes and their demands into municipal planning; coordination and networking efforts with other Solidarity Cities; promoting access to education, health, and justice for migrants and refugees; establishing referral routes for cases with special protection needs in coordination with relevant national institutions (UNHCR, 2022c). However, recently, right-wing political actors have questioned the municipalities' authority to sign these solidarity city agreements with a United Nations agency.

In 2022, a member of Parliament lodged a formal complaint with the Comptroller General of the Republic (General Accounting Office) against the municipalities that signed agreements with the UNHCR to become Solidarity Cities, arguing that the attributions for joining these international cooperation covenants lie solely in the hands of the Presidency. The Comptroller ruled in the MP's favour and asked all involved municipalities to correct this irregularity—which meant cancelling the agreements (Contraloría General de la República de Chile, 2022). This situation raised questions in the media regarding the signing of these cooperation covenants, presenting them as trying to promote the regularisation of undocumented migrants (Cárdenas, 2022).

In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior and Public Safety created the Migrant Seal (*Sello migrante*), a distinction recognising 'those Municipalities which carry out positive actions tending towards inclusion for the migrant population, based on certain quality standards and focusing on rights, inclusion, and non-discrimination' (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública de Chile, 2015, p. 2, our translation). Migrant Seal encourages the creation of local-level institutions to handle migrants' needs (Mella, 2018). However, there is also a lack of coordination between local offices and other public services (Codoceo & Cañas, 2020).

One exemplary case in Chile is the Municipality of Quilicura (Thayer, 2014), in the north of Santiago. In the early 2000s, Quilicura received a large number of migrants, especially people from Haiti. The municipality was one of the first to sign the Solidarity Cities agreement with UNHCR in 2014. In 2015, it implemented the Acceptance and Recognition Plan for Migrants and Refugees (PARMIRE) and the following year was first to obtain the Migrant Seal. Bauder and González (2018) suggest that based on the municipal management trajectory, there could be similarities between the sanctuary cities in the Global North and the welcoming policies in Quilicura, especially considering the link between bottom-up and top-down practices. However, in our analysis, this link offers a different way of understanding

sanctuary cities since in the case of Quilicura, the measures implemented by the municipality are not in opposition to national migration policies but rather end up being legitimised by the central government.

1.4.3 *Brazil*

In Brazil, we identify broad policy and specific measures aiming to provide migrants and refugees access to social assistance, housing, and other public services. In 2016, Municipal Law No. 16,478 in São Paulo created the Municipal Immigrant Population Policy. Its objectives were to ensure immigrants access to social rights and public services; promote respect for diversity and interculturality; prevent violations against rights; promote social participation of migrants; and carry out coordinated actions with civil society (Art 1). It included the creation of the Municipal Immigrants' Council, the Immigrant Care and Reference Centres (CRAI), and the Welcoming Centres as well as campaigns to prevent xenophobia and the promotion of activities to improve inclusion in the labour market, banking, language, and culture, among others. These initiatives have been focused on protecting migrants' human rights and arose prior to the implementation of the new Migration Law in Brazil in 2017. The Municipal Law thus responded to the absence of a national-level policy on migration.

An interesting and fundamental measure concerning housing demands was the establishment of welcoming lodgings for migrants and refugees. Belo Horizonte created a shelter service for homeless migrants called *Atenção ao Migrante*, which provided referrals to social assistance networks, including temporary shelters, and free travel within the country for family reunification (Prefeitura Belo Horizonte, [n.d.](#)). Minas Gerais created the Acolhe Minas Network, establishing a resettlement programme for Venezuelans, along with the Migrant and Refugee House that provides transitional lodgings in houses provided by the Catholic Church network (UNHCR, 2019).³

Some parts of Brazil have seen Indigenous Warao migrants arriving from Venezuela, leading to the creation of various programmes to offer them a better welcome. In this context, the municipality of Iguazu established an intake plan, including the 'Jardim Paraíso' migrant shelter. Similarly, the municipality of Manaus created two shelters, 'Tarumã Açu 1 e 2', to provide culturally sensitive shelter and accompaniment (UNHCR, 2022b).

³Participation by the Federal Government, UNHCR, SJMR, Belo Horizonte Archdiocese, Iglesia del Buen Viaje parish, Brazilian Army.

1.5 Depoliticisation Or Resistance: Positioning Cities?

The experiences on Solidarity Cities, Mercocities, and local initiatives in the Southern Cone unveil the strong connections between the local urban solidarity initiatives with supra-national institutions. There are only few initiatives promoted by cities independently from the UNHCR (and other UN agencies) or Mercosur. There are some cases, such as Córdoba, with notably high levels of institutionalisation of these experiences.

There are two ways to address our research question on why Solidarity Cities have a different character from the sanctuary cities in countries of the Global North that have greater autonomy from international organisms and central governments and more participation from local populations and social organisations: First, after the end of military dictatorships in the Southern Cone in the 1980s and before the policy turn in migration control in recent years, governments have been less emphatic than their Global North peers in taking punitive measures against migrants and refugees. On the contrary, during the beginning of the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000, governments carried out policies to promote the regularisation of migratory status (Acosta & Freier, 2015). The problem is, according to Brumat et al. (2018), serious problems with the recognition of their rights and—as in Chile—the scarce policies to favour their social, labour, political and cultural inclusion. This situation has led to local initiatives aiming to strengthen processes around social, cultural, political, and labour market inclusion of migrants and refugees. Second, a tradition of protecting refugee status and asylum translated into cutting-edge national regulations in this matter and, for a time, a positive outlook from governments regarding this phenomenon. International organisations thus found that Southern Cone countries were important for collaboration supporting refugee status recognition.

1.5.1 *Relative Openness to Mobility in the Southern Cone and Difficulties in Social Inclusion*

The national security-based policies of the military dictatorships towards migration gave way to a period in the 1990s in which commitments were made to protect human rights, including migrants and refugees. During this time the Southern Cone was generally a space with a predominantly non-restrictive approach towards the mobility of people, at least until the emergence of what is known as the ‘punitive turn’ or ‘hostile policies’ (Domenech, 2020). The hardening of border and migration controls in the United States and Europe began earlier than in the South. Greater control in the North allowed the situation in the South to be understood as an exceptional case, implying that South American migratory policies had overcome the control and security paradigm in favour of one based upon human rights.

Domenech (2017) observed tensions within this official discourse of exceptionality, arguing that the global migration regime is a larger construction based on the inherent tension between mobility and control. Diego Acosta and Feline Freier (2015), on the other hand, suggest a sort of contradiction in the idea of exceptionality, underlining an important paradox. The incorporation of a political discourse promoting human mobility and recognising the rights of immigrants regardless of their regularity works for certain nationalities. In practice there are enormous restrictions for certain migratory flows, such as the so-called extracontinental immigration from countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

Although the reality of migration policies and practices in the Southern Cone is complex, there are circumstances that support the general idea that, at the start of the 2000s, the region was different in this regard from other world regions. One such circumstance was the Agreement on Residence for Nationals of States Parties of Mercosur, Bolivia, and Chile, adopted in 2002, signifying a qualitative leap in regulations regarding the right to territorial mobility—although it did not necessarily translate into all signatory countries granting rights to migrant populations (Modolo, 2010). The agreement establishes that ‘nationals of a State Party who wish to reside in the territory of another State Party shall be able to obtain legal residency in the latter, according to the terms of this Agreement, via the accreditation of their nationality and presentation of the requirements provided in Article 4 of the present document’ (Article 1, our translation). This agreement facilitated access to regularity for migrants within the Mercosur bloc, where inter-regional migrants obtained access to temporary residency (Thayer et al., 2016).

The South American Migration Conference (CSM), institutionalised as a regional consulting body for migratory policies and practices in 2000, is another element that helped shape the image of the Southern Cone as an exceptional case. Although permeated by the paradigm of migratory governability (Stang, 2020), the CSM emphasised that this governability is based on respect and concern for migrants’ human rights (Ramírez & Alfaro, 2010).

During this timeframe, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) carried out actions supporting this idea of exceptionality. The former was created after a treaty signed in Brasilia in 2008, placing migration as a primary objective of its constituent Declaration and ‘an integral focus, under unrestricted respect for human rights and workers’ rights for migratory regularization and policy harmonization’ (Article 3). The latter presented a Special Communique about the Situation of Migrant Persons’ Human Rights in 2011, indicating the need to centre immigrants as an axis of migratory policy (Novick, 2012).

Despite these circumstances, in cases such as Chile the regularisation process has been severely impeded by administrative upholders, often preventing access to various rights. In other cases, such as Argentina, citizenship access has been easier for migrants coming from South America, but immigrants still face a series of social and cultural barriers to their inclusion. The initiatives associated with Solidarity Cities, as well as the programmes created by the municipalities, are thus oriented towards promoting social inclusion consistent with national policy and international

agencies, and do not necessarily present a discourse or perspective in opposition to federal or national governments (Nicolao, 2020).

The punitive turn that occurred within the last 10 years may mean a distancing between national and regional policies and the orientation of Solidarity Cities. In a somewhat simplified way, we could say that Solidarity Cities are spaces for managing diversity and access to rights, while national policies have begun to turn towards securitisation and migratory control. It should be remembered, however, that this observation arises from a documentary analysis and that a deeper perspective demands more research involving the views and interests of the actors involved in establishing these measures.

1.5.2 The Initial Legitimacy of the Right to Asylum and Refuge in the Southern Cone

Latin America has a long tradition of refugees going back to the conventions of Caracas (1928), Montevideo (1933), and Havana (1954), where political persecution of individuals was recognised as a principal criterion for protection (Clavijo & Sabogal, 2014). This tradition has been manifested in regional agreements and programmes with important influences on national legal frameworks (Barichello, 2016).

From the 1960s onward, the Southern Cone saw a wave of military dictatorships, some of which continued until the late 1980s: Argentina (1976–1983), Brazil (1964–1985), Chile (1973–1990), Paraguay (1954–1989), and Uruguay (1973–1985). Systematic human rights violations led to thousands of people leaving to seek political asylum and refuge in other countries, whether within the region or beyond. Diego Acosta (2018) estimated that 200,000 Argentines left as political exiles, while in Chile the figures are between 700,000 and 1,000,000 exiles (Dicoex, Ministerio Relaciones Exteriores Chile, 2005). In Uruguay, Schelotto (2015) indicates exiles numbered around 380,000—a figure equal to 14% of the total national population. According to the Truth and Justice Commission, the lengthy Stroessner dictatorship in Paraguay (Sosa, 2014) directly exiled 3470 people and indirectly exiled 17,348 more (mainly victims' family members or close allies).

Dictatorships and exile in the Southern Cone, as well as the violent crises and displacement in Central America during the 1980s, were two central situations that helped expand the concept of refugee established by the Geneva Convention in 1951 and move forward in the matter of protection within the region, resulting in the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984). This Declaration goes beyond the 1951 Convention and broadens the definition of refugees to 'people who have fled their countries because their lives, safety, or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, mass human rights violations, or other circumstances gravely disrupting public order' (Barichello, 2016, our translation).

In the San José Declaration (1994), countries of the region reaffirmed the importance of the Cartagena Declaration and further broadened the field of action by including protection for displaced people. Ten years later, in 2004, 20 countries from the region adopted the Mexico Action Plan to Strengthen International Protection for refugees in Latin America (PAM) to handle the complex humanitarian situation arising from forced displacement within the region, arising mainly from the situation in Colombia (Barichello, 2016; UNHCR, 2007).

The PAM used the principle of regional solidarity and shared responsibility as the basis for the initiatives proposed. Protection for refugees thus centred on four areas: strengthening legal and operational frameworks to protect refugees and internally displaced people in the region; strengthening national commissions for refugee determination; operating national and regional protection networks; and training and promoting international refugee law (Andia, 2010). The commitments established in the PAM included improvements in implementing lasting solutions through three specific programmes: Resettlement, Solidarity Cities, and the Solidarity Borders Programme.

In December 2014, 30 years after the Cartagena Declaration, the governments of 28 regional countries met in Brasília and agreed on the Brazil Declaration and Action Plan, consisting of 11 strategic programmes grouped into six areas of interest: quality of asylum; comprehensive, complementary and sustainable solutions; solidarity with the northern triangle of Central America; regional solidarity with the Caribbean; eradication of statelessness; and regional cooperation. The lasting solutions reaffirm the commitment to Solidarity Cities and highlighted the positive experience of the programme carried out in São Paulo. The Plan established a coordination mechanism to ensure access to social, cultural, and economic rights. The City of São Paulo also provides free public services to refugees and asylum seekers regardless of their migration status (first triennial report, Brazil Plan of Action).

The Cartagena Declaration and the experience of exile in the Southern Cone influenced the creation of national laws and favoured the construction of a protection system with solidarity as a central dimension (Olea, 2012). There is ample recognition of legal progress regarding the incorporation of the Cartagena definition of refuge, the principle of non-refoulement, confidentiality, non-discrimination, and non-sanctioning for irregular entry. National laws created national refugee committees (CONARE), dependent on the various ministries, and the establishment of mechanisms to request and recognise refuge.

Mercosur has also contributed to an image of protection for asylum and refuge within the Southern Cone. The Rio Declaration on Refuge (2000) extended the criteria for non-refoulement, deporting, or expelling refugees to full members (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) and associated states (Bolivia and Chile). In 2012, with the Mercosur Declaration of principles on international refugee protections, known as the Fortaleza Declaration, there was what Clavijo and Sabogal (2014) called a 'turn towards solidarity as a regional commitment strategy', with an even greater centrality of human rights and 'the moral commitments of States.' This instrument established cooperation and coordination mechanisms for institutional reinforcement on this matter, along with training and sensitisation

strategies for implementation. The authors are generally critical of the approach to asylum and refuge in this subregion, indicating that: ‘This discursive turn towards refuge understood from a solidarity perspective seems to perform a tutelary positioning wherein the subjects, fundamentally perceived as victims...are considered vulnerable subjects, often leaving their capacity for agency invisible’ (Clavijo & Sabogal, 2014, p. 171).

Progress at the national and South American levels in protecting refugees complemented the UNHCR agenda, policies applied by national governments, and the measures requested by local governments governments, and the measures requested by local governments (Ramírez et al., 2017). However, as with the case of migration, recent years have seen a turn aimed at reducing the number of refugee requests and acceptances, which could affect the synergies between these three levels of actors.

1.6 Conclusion

A first aspect to highlight in relation to the topic addressed in this paper is the scarce bibliography available on the discussion of sanctuary cities in the Southern Cone. Throughout this article we have indicated that one possible explanation for this absence has to do precisely with the character that cities of solidarity assume in light of UNHCR’s refugee policy. At the same time, this is linked to the fact that no experiences comparable to sanctuary cities have emerged in our subregion as in the Global North, which could plausibly be explained, as we proposed, by two main reasons: the generation of mechanisms that would have favoured the mobility and regular entry of migrants in the post-dictatorship period prior to the recent punitive migratory shift, and the long and dense Southern Cone tradition of protecting refuge and asylum.

The Solidarity Cities we examined in the Southern Cone constitute an initiative ‘from above’, implemented from the perspectives of international organisms such as the UNHCR, with their governance logic, and which take on certain forms of understanding inclusion and integration as strongly oriented towards neoliberal governability, emphasising mobility management and the economic benefits for the receiving societies. In this context, we observe low participation levels among citizens, refugees, and migrants and few links to civil society organisations. In fact, the actions carried out in these programmes are generally aimed at individuals. This situation merits reflection, since as Adriana Ortega (2021, pp. 96–97) notes: ‘Local migration policies are not just another public policy; their backdrop includes migrant struggles, direct social and political participation, active resistance, the strategies of migrant collectives or individuals, and migratory processes’ international and transnational dynamics.’ Ignoring the ‘bottom up’ dimension could condemn the measures associated with Solidarity Cities in the Southern Cone to fail in

meeting their goals of integrating the migrant and refugee population within the receiving society's social fabric.

Unlike many of the sanctuary cities, the Solidarity Cities of the Southern Cone do not necessarily oppose their national governments on migration policy. Rather they tend to be framed within the general guidelines of national and regional public policy aimed at including migrant and refugee populations. However, this harmony between national and local policy could change as national policies increasingly enact stronger securitisation policies and the number of irregular migrants increases.

Acknowledgments This chapter was developed within the framework of the project Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective, Partnership Grants 895-2021-1000, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada, led by Toronto Metropolitan University. We would also like to thank the Centre for the Study of Social Cohesion and Conflict (COES, ANID/FONDAP/1523A00 and Proyect Fondecyt/ANID 1251400).

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Chapter 2

Refuging Practices for Migrant and Asylum-Seeking Populations in Central America: Mexico and Costa Rica



Matías Fouillieux Bambach 

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to identify and shed light on integration and protection policies and practices for vulnerable migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Central America associated with concepts such as sanctuary city, hospitality, and solidarity linked to the sanctuary movement that originated in the United States in the 1980s. A qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive review of secondary sources, academic and institutional documents from public sources, international organisations, and civil society addresses the following research questions: How is the concept of urban sanctuary applied in Central America? What political actions and social practices are linked to this concept? What are the main challenges in implementing the corresponding political actions and social practices?

Based on the key findings presented by Margaret Godoy and Harald Bauder (2021) regarding the scope of the sanctuary city concept in Latin America, this chapter aims to expand on the information and establish links, connections, and disconnections in the implementation of the concept in Central America. The chapter takes into account the fact that the subregion is characterised by forced migration, particularly to the United States. However, a significant proportion of the population fleeing their homes in pursuit of the ‘American dream’ ends up returning due to the restrictive migration and border policies of the United States. Consequently, concepts related to the integration, inclusion, and protection of migrants and refugees are less prominent in Central America than in North America or Europe.

I selected Mexico and Costa Rica as case studies because these countries serve as transit, containment, and reception areas for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. In the case of Mexico, the Municipal Centres for Migrants were established

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through a partnership between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and five local governments, providing secure information on immigration procedures and services for migrants, as well as raising awareness about the risks associated with irregular migration. At the same time, in the case of Mexico, we observe legislative advancements and practices carried out by civil society in response to the massive migrant caravans originating in Central America and heading to the United States.

The analysis reveals differences in the conception and implementation of the ‘sanctuary city’ concept in Central America compared to the Global North. On the one hand, in Central America plans and practices aimed at promoting the integration and protection of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are coordinated and executed by intergovernmental and supranational entities such as the Mexico Action Plan (MAP), the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS), and the Central American Integration System (CAIS). Furthermore, the role of international organisations in financing, developing, and implementing sanctuary movement-related policies and actions alter the meaning of these initiatives: in Central America: local sanctuary policies and practices do not represent opposition or resistance to national politics—one of the principal drivers of the movement’s origin in the United States.

In contrast, the definition of sanctuary cities used in the Global North specifically refers to the refugee population that does not align with the reality of Central America. This misalignment arises because current migration categories are complex and, while they largely correspond to forced displacement, not all migrants necessarily meet the requirements for refugee status, even though they need reception mechanisms and facilitation of access to rights. Moreover, the granting of refugee status has been decreasing even as asylum applications have increased, particularly in the two case studies. As a result, the development of plans or programmes focused on this population is extremely limited and insufficient.

The remainder of this chapter explores the current panorama of migrations in the subregion, with the objective of contextualising the analysis. It then examines the origins of the sanctuary city concept and its scope in the Global North. Thereafter, the methodological aspects are presented, followed by the results of both case studies, with their respective discussions and conclusions.

2.2 Overview of Migration in the Region

According to the latest official estimates from the United Nations, in 2020 there were 281 million international migrants worldwide, equivalent to 3.6% of the global population (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). In Central America, the migrant population reached 2.3 million people, equivalent to 1.3% of the region’s total population (UN & DAES, 2020).

In Central America there was a significant increase in people fleeing their homes due to violence and lack of opportunities, reflected in a 137% rise from 6.82 million

in 1990 to approximately 16.2 million in 2020 (UN & DAES, 2020). While in the 1970s and 1980s, the main drivers of Central American emigration were socio-political factors and state repression, today it is necessary to also consider the precarious living conditions and pervasive violence in the region (Fouilloux, 2020).

On the continent, migration to North America has historically been the focus of academic research related to migration and development processes, forced migration, family reunification, the labour market, remittances, and economic conditions (Castles & Delgado Wise, 2007; Posada, 2009; Binford, 2002; Canales, 2006). However, the migratory phenomenon in the subregion has evolved in recent years due to various sociopolitical, economic, and environmental crises, especially in countries such as Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela.

Globally, Venezuela and Colombia rank third and fourth in terms of emigration, with over five and three million emigrants, respectively. Regarding the proportion of emigrants to the total population of each country, Jamaica, El Salvador, and Venezuela are at the top. In this scenario, where forced migrations are tripling, more than five million Venezuelans have fled the country, with approximately 85% concentrated in Latin America and the Caribbean (ACNUR, 2022). This phenomenon has shifted the scholarly focus in the region, with increased research and policies addressing borders, transnationalism, gender, organised transnational crime, and migration control (Thayer, 2016; Tapia Ladino, 2010; Stang & Stefoni 2016; Liberona Concha, 2015; Fouilloux, 2020).

UNHCR data suggest that, whether migrating voluntarily or under duress, people move internally (intra-regional movements from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, and from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala to Mexico) or towards the north (United States). Many of those arriving in these countries are returnees or deportees due to the restrictive policies of the United States, both domestically and at the borders. This type of return migration is a key factor in analysing policies for the protection and reception of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees associated with the concepts of urban 'sanctuary', 'hospitality', and 'solidarity'.

Regarding migration from the Northern Triangle to the north, migration appears as a complex phenomenon due to the various profiles it has adopted. Concerns about understanding and approaching it from academic theories and the development of public policies highlight its dynamic nature, driven by a significant increase in international migrations. 'Emigration and immigration continue to provide states, societies, and migrants with many opportunities. At the same time, migration has emerged in recent years as a political challenge in matters such as integration, displacement, safe migration, and border management' (IOM, 2018, p. 13).

In this context, migration trends in Latin America and the Caribbean demonstrate that emigration continues to be concentrated towards the United States. The report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Canales & Rojas, 2018) states that 40% of regional migration is Mexican, highlighting the increase in migratory flows within the region in contrast to flows outside of Latin America and the Caribbean. Additionally, the region has the highest-flow migration corridor in the world; thousands of migrants, mainly from Central American, South

American, and Caribbean countries but also from Africa and Asia, pass annually through the border between Mexico and the United States (CIDH, 2015).

Thus, inequality, poverty, corruption, organised crime, and drug trafficking are factors driving migration in Central America. In addition to these elements, socio-environmental disasters such as hurricanes, droughts, earthquakes, and floods are increasingly significant. Events like Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which devastated Central America, two earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001 that caused widespread destruction and loss of life, earthquakes in Haiti in 2010 and 2021, and Hurricane Stan in 2005, which caused flooding in almost all of Central America, have profoundly shaped the region's trajectory.

2.3 Origins and Scope of the Sanctuary City Concept

The emergence of sanctuary cities in the United States is closely related to the exponential increase in emigration from Central America. Faced with the difficulty of receiving and regularising certain migrants and the return of deported individuals, the sanctuary movement emerged and now has a global reach (Stefoni et al., 2024).

In the 1980s, the United States government ended the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Central American migrants and implemented various policies targeting irregular migration. In response, some religious groups offered refuge in their buildings to immigrants at risk of deportation, marking the first stage of the sanctuary movement. The regularisation campaigns of the 1990s reduced the movement's activity.

A second period of strength quickly began in response to the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, with a focus on national security. This second stage has been characterised by an increase in the number of places of worship joining the initiative and the involvement of university communities. At this time, the 'new sanctuary movement' was spearheaded by local governments (Cruz Lera, 2019) aiming to counter the criminalisation of irregular migration.

The U.S. federal government system complicates migration management due to the division of powers. On the one hand, the federal government establishes overarching immigration policies and controls customs and borders. On the other, local governments have incentives to create immigration policies relating to reception and integration (Cruz Lera, 2019). Consequently, differing positions between local governments and the federal government regarding migration have sometimes resulted in conflicting migration management measures.

The current definition of sanctuary cities has been built on these experiences of immigrant reception, increasingly encompassing a broader spectrum of policies. From Harald Bauder's (2017) perspective of sanctuary cities in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, urban sanctuary includes all policies and practices aimed at facilitating the inclusion of irregular immigrants and refugees in local contexts. For Estefanía Cruz Lera (2019, p. 3), the definition of a sanctuary city should be understood broadly because it incorporates 'a heterogeneous set of

practices, laws, and policies that share an original motivation but differ in their practical effects.’ Regarding the ‘new sanctuary movement’, these practices, laws, and policies are characterised by their opposition or at least questioning of national immigration policy guidelines (Garcés & Eitel, 2019).

Returning to Central America, its countries of emigration are characterised by forced and voluntary migration, transit territories, and a high percentage of return migration resulting from deportations from the United States, coupled with an increase in asylum requests due to socio-political crises in Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. In the context of geographical to socio-political differences, I pose the following question: How is the migration phenomenon addressed with respect to the local integration and reception of the migrant, asylum-seeking, and refugee populations? Are the migration actions, practices, and policies associated with the sanctuary cities movement different from those implemented in the Global North? To address these questions, I analyse the cases of Mexico and Costa Rica, two countries in a subregion that, to varying degrees, adopt integration policies and practices resonating with the concepts of urban ‘sanctuary’, ‘hospitality’, and ‘solidarity’.

2.4 Methodology

First, I identified the countries that are part of the Central American subregion: Panama, Costa Rica, Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico. I then conducted a literature review for each country involving various sources, including academic and non-academic literature (reports, presentations, and reports). I incorporated key words used in the Global North associated with the concept of sanctuary cities, as defined by Godoy & Bauder (2021), and expanded the search to include terms such as solidarity and integration to identify related policies, practices, and actions associated with urban sanctuary.

From the search, 12 official reports, ten articles, and three news stories from the last decade were selected. These sources describe both the practices and policies related to ‘sanctuary cities’ and other practices that may align with this category, given the limited use of the concept in Latin America (Godoy & Bauder, 2021). The data extracted from the texts was transferred to and categorised in an Excel spreadsheet according to types of action and practices. This method facilitated the establishment of a general overview of the subregion.

Simultaneously, a parallel review was conducted on international regimes specialising in migration issues, particularly the United Nations Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Reports from the UNHCR website were included to understand the position of refugees and asylum seekers who are subject to international humanitarian law, state governance frameworks, and day-to-day management challenges.

2.5 Results and Discussion

The legal and protective framework for asylum seekers and recognised refugees in Central America is rooted in key international instruments such as the 1949 Geneva Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. The latter defines a refugee as someone who has fled their country ‘because their life, safety, or freedom has been threatened by widespread violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive human rights violations, or other circumstances that have seriously disrupted public order’ (n/p).

However, the refugee category has been questioned due to the fragility and breadth of the concept. According to Macklin (1995), reasons for displacement such as environmental disasters, hunger, and wars are not considered within the legal definition. For the purpose of this analysis, I draw on the arguments advanced by Jørgen Carling (2015) that highlight the challenges of legally labelling and categorising individuals seeking refuge in the context of increasingly complex trajectories and displacements. This intricacy makes it difficult to recognise many asylum seekers as refugees, thereby limiting their access to rights.

In Mexico, 118,800 individual asylum applications were registered in 2022, representing a 10% decline compared to 2021. Considering Venezuelan applicants specifically, the top three recipient countries are the United States, Mexico, and Costa Rica (ACNUR, 2023). Unfortunately, it was not possible to cross-reference this information with official figures as the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (Comar) has not updated its information since 2018. However, according to unofficial figures, of the 14,000 asylum requests filed in 2017, only 1907 were approved (HispanTV, 2018). Additionally, the General Coordinator of Comar, Andrés Ramírez, stated that over the past 10 years, as of November 2022, 419,337 asylum requests were submitted, with 355,523 filed between 2019 and 2022. Of these, 100,919 have been granted recognition or some form of complementary protection (Badillo, 2023).

Costa Rica ranks among the top four countries worldwide with the highest number of new asylum seekers. At the time of this research, there are 216,145 individuals in need of international protection, of whom 11,187 have been recognised as refugees and 204,730 are asylum seekers, including those awaiting appointments to formalise their applications (MIRPS, 2022, p. 12).

According to data from Costa Rica’s Refugee Unit of the Migration Directorate, 86,788 asylum applications were submitted in 2022, of which 80,028, or 92%, were from Nicaraguan citizens. This was followed by Venezuelans (2286), Colombians (1492), and Cubans (1095). Only 4500 applications were processed; of these, 2826 were approved, while 481 applications from Nicaraguans were denied, reflecting an approval rate of 85%. Some pending applicants eventually abandon the process, while others must continue waiting for a resolution.

According to the United Nations, by 2022 only 12,481 of the 236,983 Nicaraguan citizens who have fled due to the sociopolitical crisis in the country have been recognised as refugees—a figure equivalent to 5% of the total applications. Meanwhile, 224,502 individuals remain awaiting a decision on their requests (ACNUR, 2022).

Costa Rica and Mexico receive the largest number of asylum applications and refugees. In the case of Costa Rica, the majority come from Nicaragua and Venezuela, while Mexico receives the entire population of Latin America and other continents that intend to cross into the United States. At the same time, only 13% have been recognised as refugees, while 63% are still waiting for a decision to be made on their asylum application, which would grant legal, economic and social protection (ACNUR, 2022).

2.5.1 *Subregional Institutional Mechanisms*

Although most asylum seekers and refugees in the region are transient, Mexico and Costa Rica have also become final destination countries due to the crisis in Nicaragua and restrictive immigration policies and increased border controls by the United States. Therefore, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, initiatives and reception practices emerged in Central America with the objective of establishing protection and integration of this population. Figure 2.1 shows the number of actions and practices associated with the sanctuary movement in the region.

The countries with the greatest number of sanctuary actions and practices detected are Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico. The concentration in these countries is a result of forced migrations of citizens from Nicaragua, Honduras, El



Fig. 2.1 Number of initiatives to welcome and integrate migrant and refugee populations in Central America

Salvador, and Guatemala, and bilateral treaties with the United States to control migratory flows north by containing migrants and refugees in these countries.

The concept of ‘solidarity city’ was thus born in Latin America through the Mexico Action Plan (MAP), which was implemented in 2004 and signed by 20 countries in the region. The Plan’s main pillars include strengthening legal frameworks for refugees and internally displaced populations; advancing legislation concerning specific protection needs related to age and gender; strengthening the National Refugee Commissions; strengthening national and regional protection networks; and training and promoting international refugee law. To propose lasting solutions, the Plan also considers the ‘solidarity borders’, ‘solidarity cities’, and ‘regional solidarity resettlement’ programmes (Del Carpio & Annoni, 2015).

In 2017, Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama adopted the San Pedro Sula Declaration and agreed to work together on the implementation of the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS); El Salvador joined this initiative in 2019. MIRPS promotes regional cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination for greater shared responsibility in prevention, protection, and lasting solutions. It promotes a participatory approach by directly involving individuals with protection needs and populations affected by violence and insecurity. Additionally, it integrates regional and international organisations, as well as cooperating states that are members of the MIRPS Support Platform and that are committed to the humanitarian and development agenda. To date, since the Declaration’s signing, the subregion has experienced a more than tenfold increase in refugees and asylum seekers, rising from 44,554 in 2017 to 499,252 in 2022 (MIRPS, 2022).

Both the MAP and the MIRPS are initiatives that have received financial and logistical support from supranational organisations such as UNHCR and IOM as well as from political bodies like the OAS, thus shaping and determining the main protection and integration practices and policies associated with the ‘sanctuary cities’ concept in Central America.

Another institutional body to consider is the Central American Integration System (CAIS) established in late 1991 by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, and joined by Belize in 2000 and the Dominican Republic in 2013. Its goal was to create a regional mechanism for coordinating, concerting, and consulting on migratory matters. The Commission of Migration Authorities of the member countries (OCAM) was incorporated into Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA, *n.d.*), with the IOM assuming the Technical Secretariat of SICA starting from early 1999.

One of the key milestones of these institutional bodies was the Central American Free Mobility Agreement (CA4), which allows nationals of the signatory countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) to move freely without a passport and with streamlined migration documents. This agreement also eliminated visas for citizens of member countries and facilitated free movement (SICA). However, for the analysis of the case study below, it is important to note that Costa Rica is not part of the agreement. This means that Nicaraguan citizens, who make up more than 80% of its migrant population, must obtain a visa and have a passport

for regular entry, complicating the integration of those Nicaraguans who were forcibly displaced and could not properly plan their migration.

2.6 Case Studies: Mexico and Costa Rica

The case of Mexico is paradigmatic as it converges with a series of initiatives such as laws, declarations, and civil society initiatives aimed at promoting the reception and integration of the migrant and refugee populations. In 2012, within the framework of Mexico City's participation in the Intercultural Cities network of the Council of Europe (CoE), the Law on Interculturality, Assistance to Migrants, and Mobility of the Federal District was implemented in Mexico City. The law sought to 'regulate hospitality and promote interculturality, as well as safeguard the rights derived from the process of human mobility' (Government of Mexico City, 2021). This law applies to individuals of different national origins, guests, migrants, and migrant family members.

This legal initiative establishes that 'no human being will be identified or recognized as illegal due to their migratory status' (Marzorati & Marconi, 2018, p. 156). It led to the creation of a Guest Registry and a document that allows access to municipal services and the exercise of rights. However, Article 6 states that the ID card 'does not replace any official document issued by federal authorities, nor will it be considered as a migratory document' (Government of Mexico City, 2021). This has caused difficulties in recognising the ID cards of migrants and refugees by various entities (Marzorati & Marconi, 2018).

At the same time, the national Directorate of Guest, Migrant, and Family Care of the Secretariat of Rural Development and Equity among Communities (SEDEREC) was responsible for implementing programmes and public policies through a series of actions and initiatives to provide support and protection to the migrant and refugee populations. Its responsibilities include to:

direct assistance to migrants and their families (legal guidance on public services, support for procedures with the National Migration Institute (NMI), Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (Comar), Civil Registry etc.); promoting funding opportunities for civil society organizations (CSOs) to 'enhance the concept of a welcoming and intercultural city' and to grant financial support to migrants who want to promote business activities; support programs for migrants returning or passing through Mexico City (operational 'Welcome Migrant to Mexico City'). (Marzorati & Marconi, 2018, p. 156)

However, due to the full recognition of Mexico City as an intercultural city and the programmes and initiatives, civil society has criticised the Law's inefficient and ineffective implementation and the lack of political will (Marzorati & Marconi, 2018). Mateos Cortés (2011) suggests that the difficulties in implementation relate to importing an intercultural discourse from Europe without taking into account the different contexts: in Europe, the meaning is mediated by the role of the immigrant, while in Latin America it is mediated by the role of the Indigenous population—although in both, these are perceived as a problem population.

Regarding initiatives emerging from civil society associated with the sanctuary movement, according to Flores Castillo (2021) there are positive experiences of supportive communities in the regions of Tabasco, Veracruz, and the State of Mexico. Castillo explains that in 'transit locations, an understanding of migration is constructed that contrasts with the official discourse promoted by public policies, which frame migration as a national security issue' (Flores Castillo, 2021, p. 2).

Supportive communities arise as a result of the presence of organised civil society carrying out protective and solidarity actions in the main transit areas in the form of shelters for migrant populations that provide food, accommodation, hygiene and health services, and various acts of solidarity by neighbouring communities (Flores Castillo, 2021). However, this type of support on the route offering solidarity by the community is more humanitarian assistance than an effort aimed at generating a long-term positive integration.

In the case of Costa Rica, since 2018 the IOM, in coordination with local governments, has supported the creation of Municipal Migrant Centres (MMC) to facilitate orderly, safe, and humane migration, adapting their functions, modalities, and services to respond to the needs of the local context and provide accurate and reliable information on migration procedures and services for migrants. MMCs also aim to mitigate risks associated with irregular migration and disseminate information on regular migration options for primarily Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran populations. Currently, there are five MMCs located in Mora, Desamparados, Upala, Talamanca, and La Cruz.

This coordination between supranational organisations and local governments reinforces the idea that the benefits and challenges of migration governance are primarily experienced at the local level (in the labour market, business creation, integration of individuals into host communities). Migrants are subject primarily to local conditions (availability of services, housing, labour market), even if these are not related to national conditions.

This model is developed by the IOM as a direct and local communication channel under the leadership of local counterparts, which, in the case of Costa Rica, are local governments. However, it raises questions about the degree of autonomy the MMCs have, how information about their operation is accounted for, and their connection with civil society organisations working to promote the protection and integration of migrant and refugee populations.

For the purpose of this case study, I delve into the services provided by the MMC in the canton of Mora. According to the document titled *Cantonal Indicators National Population and Housing Censuses 2000 and 2011*, at the start of the 2010s, the canton of Mora had 26,294 inhabitants, of which 16,088 resided in the district of Colón where the MMC is located (León, 2021, p. 2). Nationally, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC, 2011) indicated that the migrant population represented 8.20% of the total population, equivalent to 489,200 immigrants located in the country of a total population of 4,658,887.

According to the latest available report at this writing, at the national level, MMCs served approximately 13,074 people from July 2018 to May 2022: 79% were of Nicaraguan nationality and 7% Venezuelan; 57% identified as women and

43% as men (MMC, 2022a). In the case of the canton of Mora, from June 2021 to May 2022, the MMC provided services to 543 people. According to the information collected only during May 2022, 18 people accessed the services: 72% were Nicaraguan nationals, with an equal share identifying as women or men. Regarding age, 78% were between 26 and 45 years old, while in terms of educational levels, 61% had engaged in secondary education but only 18% had graduated; of the people who didn't complete secondary education, 67% were women (MMC, 2022b).

Other important figures relate to employment access. Of the total people served in May 2022, 72% were employed; of those 54% were men and 46% women. However, 62% were working in the informal sector. Out of all the people assisted, 78% were found to have one or more vulnerabilities, including economic vulnerability, at-risk migrant women, individuals without documentation, and people with disabilities—each representing roughly 25% of the total. Finally, all activities carried out by the Mora MMC consisted of providing verbal and printed information and referring individuals to other institutions or organisations.

It's worth noting that one of the outreach activities was developed to strengthen the capabilities of community organisations and the integration of migrants with the aim of contributing to the sustainability and scalability variables of local development (MMC, 2022a). Nonetheless, this represents only one activity to publicise the services provided by the MMC.

2.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I reviewed literature on the practices and programmes developed in Central America, specifically in the cases of Mexico and Costa Rica, that emulate the practices and programmes of the sanctuary cities movement in the Global North, in particular the United States, for the integration and protection of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. This review reveals significant differences in formulation and implementation of sanctuary in Central America and the Global North and raises the question of the impact on the beneficiary population.

On the one hand, the classic definition of sanctuary cities in the Global North refers specifically to the refugee populations and later to undocumented populations requiring protection from deportation. This does not align with the reality of Central America for two reasons. First, current migration categories are complex and, although largely related to forced displacement, they may not necessarily apply to refugee status yet do require mechanisms for reception and access to rights. Second, the processing and granting of refugee status have been declining throughout the Americas, especially in the cases of Mexico and Costa Rica. Therefore, the development of local plans or programmes focusing on this population would be extremely limited and insufficient.

Additionally, in Central America local plans and practices aimed at promoting the integration and protection of migrants and refugees are typically coordinated, funded, and executed by intergovernmental and supranational entities such as the

Mexico Action Plan (MAP) and the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS), as well as ACNUR as a central figure in promoting various reception programmes or actions. This situation—although not negative in itself—alters the meaning of these local actions as they do not represent opposition or resistance to national or regional policies, one of the main factors that initially gave rise to the movement.

Contrary to what the literature in the Global North suggests regarding sanctuary cities, we observe a disconnect between top-down and bottom-up policies due to the lack of linkage between practices promoted by international organisations and civil society organisations. This disconnect generates uncertainty about the population's participation in the development and implementation of effective actions for the integration and protection of the migrant and refugee community.

In the case of Costa Rica, the review identified a connection between international organisations and local governments but only in regard to a series of isolated actions with little involvement of civil society. In Mexico, there has been legislative progress. However, challenges in the implementation of the law and a Eurocentric view in the conceptualisation of intercultural processes without considering the differences between continents has led to a complexification of the approach used due to a lack of understanding of interculturality in the subregion. Regarding civil society, the review revealed progress in the implementation of reception practices and actions, but with a humanitarian assistance focus rather than a focus on long-term integration.

At the same time, in Costa Rica, there are agreements for free circulation to promote economic and social integration. Yet, the socio-political situation in the country hinders regularisation and subsequent inclusion of migrants and refugees. Costa Rica, not being part of the Central American Free Mobility Convention (CA4), excludes Nicaraguan migrants from accessing free circulation, visa waivers, and other associated support policies. This policy represents a difficulty considering the forced nature of migration resulting from socio-political crises, violence, and repression.

On the other hand, both countries are among the top recipients of asylum applications globally, despite a decrease in Mexico over the past year. However, there has been a drop in the acceptance and processing rate of asylum applications. The source of funding for the care of these mobile populations (ACNUR) and the construction of policies focused on the care of refugees indicate a significant gap in the scope of these policies as refugee status is either not being recognised or applied to the extent required.

Overall, local initiatives in Central America are defined by the unique characteristics of the subregion, with high rates of internal mobility, expulsion of people and the consequent return of migrants, as well as passage corridors associated with waiting and immobility among migrants in transit. This is particularly the case in Mexico, which operates as a country of containment of Central American migration to the United States, as well as in Costa Rica with the presence of Nicaraguans awaiting the approval of refuge. This unique situation demonstrates the need to

implement integration and protection policies that go beyond the articulated actions for those who apply or wait for the shelter's resolution.

Acknowledgments This article is part of the project Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective, Partnership Grants 895-2021-1000, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). At the same time, this article is part of the postdoctoral Fondecyt Project N°3220252 (2022–2025) funded by the National Agency for Research and Development (ANID) Chile, for which the author is the Responsible Researcher.

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Chapter 3

‘Without Partners our Hands are tied!’ Exploring Multi-stakeholder Partnerships on Migration and Displacement in African Intermediary Cities



Janina Stürner-Siovitz  and Lasse Juhl Morthorst 

3.1 Introduction: Zooming in on Migration and Displacement in African Intermediary Cities

In the coming decades, Africa will experience the fastest urban growth worldwide. Africa’s population is estimated to double between 2020 and 2050, with two-thirds of this growth predicted to take place in cities and driven by demographic change as well as migration and displacement (OECD/SAWC, 2020). The Africa Migration Report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the African Union Commission shows that most migration movements take place within, and not beyond, the African continent (Achieng et al., 2020). The number of international migrants documented in African statistics rose from 15.1 million in 2000 to 26.6 million in 2019. In 2020, African countries hosted 10% of all international migrants worldwide, one-quarter of which were considered refugees (Hovy et al., 2020). Recent UNHCR data shows that around seven million refugees lived in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2022, representing 20% of the global refugee population. In the same year, around 2.6 million persons were newly displaced within their countries in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, and over 2.6 million in Southern Africa (UNHCR, 2023). African movements of migration and displacement are largely caused by processes of socio-economic transformation, labour diversification, urbanisation, and environmental stressors as well as conflict and persecution (Hovy et al., 2020).

In these movements, medium-sized and smaller urban centres play an increasingly important role as hubs of origin, transit, and destination (Awumbila, 2017; Mercandalli & Losch, 2017; Fumagalli & Schaefer, 2020). Nevertheless, the attention of researchers and policymakers has primarily been on the movement of people

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towards major urban centres and capital cities (Bauder, 2019; Kallergis, 2022). Intermediary cities, situated between rural and metropolitan areas, have received little attention in both academic and policy discussions (Lozet, 2017). Understanding the role of intermediary cities in Africa's urbanisation and migration dynamics is becoming ever more crucial as African cities with populations of one million or fewer currently represent the highest relative share among all African cities—a trend predicted to continue in the next decades (UN Habitat, 2020).

Many definitions put forth for intermediary cities vary between 50,000 and one million inhabitants (UCLG, n.d.). But population is not everything. We consider *intermediary cities* as urban spaces linking capital cities with smaller towns and rural areas through flows of goods, ideas, funds, and people. At the same time, these cities are *secondary cities* regarding economic status, municipal capacities, and resources, as national development strategies and (inter)national investment have prioritised capital cities for a long time (Roberts, 2014; Stürner-Siovitx & Morthorst, 2023a).

Urban growth represents both an opportunity and a challenge for local governments of African intermediary cities. While growth can bring about socio-economic development allowing people to establish livelihoods and social networks in cities (Curtis, 2014; UN DESA, 2019), continuous economic, social, and cultural changes may also lead to unprecedented challenges for local governments and communities alike. These challenges mainly revolve around limitations regarding housing, adequate social-service provision, access to employment and education, and legal protection (Davis, 2006; Fernández de Losada, 2019; Walnycki et al., 2019; Earle, 2020). Since migrants and refugees tend to form part of more vulnerable or even invisible segments of the urban population during periods of their lives, they may be disproportionately affected by consequences of such negative urbanisation dynamics (Stürner-Siovitx, 2022).

As African intermediary cities are spaces of origin, transit, and destination, their local governments are confronted with core issues of mixed migration, but often lack the legal mandates, resources, and capacities to respond to changing urban realities (Stürner-Siovitx & Morthorst, 2023b). Given that many African cities host a broad variety of local, national, and international actors working directly or indirectly on questions of migration and displacement, partnership approaches could prove beneficial for African local governments. Indeed, there is a small but growing number of local governments engaging in different forms of multi-stakeholder cooperation.

To explore such emerging forms of cooperative action, we put forth the research questions: What are the central opportunities and challenges of multi-stakeholder partnerships addressing migration and displacement in African intermediary cities? What policy recommendations can we derive from analysing cooperation constellations and gaps across different local contexts? This chapter offers some answers to these questions, drawing on action research of the Equal Partnerships project in cooperation with six African intermediary cities: Garissa in Kenya, Gulu in Uganda, Kumasi in Ghana, Oujda in Morocco, Saint Louis in Senegal, and Sfax in Tunisia

(Equal Partnerships, 2023). As the introduction has situated the topic of multi-stakeholder partnerships in the broader context of African urbanisation, migration, and displacement dynamics, the second part of this chapter outlines the research methodology. Part three presents central findings on cooperation challenges and opportunities, which serve in part four to develop recommendations for cooperative urban action on migration and displacement in African intermediary cities. Part five summarises key findings and provides guidance for future research on multi-stakeholder partnerships in African intermediary cities.

3.2 Methodology: Developing Research Partnerships with African Intermediary Cities

Research for this chapter was conducted in the framework of the Equal Partnerships project focusing on African intermediary cities as actors and partners of urban migration governance. The project is coordinated by the Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN) of the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg and was developed in cooperation with the African city network United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa), the social enterprise Samuel Hall, the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), and six partner cities: Garissa in Kenya, Gulu in Uganda, Kumasi in Ghana, Oujda in Morocco, Saint Louis in Senegal, and Sfax in Tunisia. Through participatory research, workshops, and networking formats we brought together local, national, and international actors to develop urban stakeholder mappings, identify opportunities and challenges of cooperative urban action on migration and displacement, and offer stakeholders spaces to create practical impulses and policy recommendations for multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Between 2022 and 2024, the Equal Partnerships project engaged in research partnerships with six cities following the organisation of an international migration workshop at the Africities Summit in Kisumu (Kenya) in May 2022. Fifteen cities potentially interested in exploring multi-stakeholder partnerships were invited to take part in this migration workshop. Given the explorative character of the research, we chose to adopt a most-important-case design (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009), which enabled us to focus on those cities that 'represent the most significant illustration of the phenomenon of interest that we can find' (Ljungkvist, 2016, p. 100). In concrete terms, the Equal Partnerships project was interested in analysing (1) opportunities and challenges of multi-stakeholder partnerships in, (2) African intermediary cities, (3) where local governments showed interest in questions of migration and displacement.¹ We therefore applied the following criteria to select and offer research partnerships to cities:

¹ That does not necessarily mean that representatives of these local governments considered migration as a primarily positive or negative phenomenon, but rather that they recognised migration as a

- cities that are intermediary cities in the sense that they are not capital cities, that their population may vary between 50,000 and one million inhabitants, that they connect smaller cities and rural areas with capital cities and are secondary in terms of the political attention and economic investment they receive; cities that have longstanding or recent experience with different forms of migration and displacement, including related to conflict, climate change, natural disasters, economic opportunities or losses, education, family reunification, and marriage; cities where we could identify actors in the local government or administration interested in addressing questions of migration and displacement.

Gathering information on these criteria did prove challenging for two main reasons. First, data on migration and displacement on the African continent is in many contexts scarce, often outdated, and rarely broken down to the urban level. Secondly, due to a lack of legal mandates, resources, and capacities, those African local governments addressing questions of migration or displacement often do so in indirect ways—for instance by opening basic services to all their inhabitants. However, these practices will not necessarily show up in a research matrix looking specifically for municipal action on migration or displacement. Furthermore, individuals engaging on these topics in the local governments and administrations rarely carry references to migration or displacement in their job titles. Their engagement tends to be in addition to their daily work, which may be related to urban statistics (such as in Gulu, Uganda), climate change (such as in Saint Louis, Senegal), or international relations (such as in Sfax, Tunisia). A city administration with a dedicated migration unit, as we found it in Oujda, Morocco, is rather the exception.

Due to this difficulty in identifying city action on migration and displacement, we cannot claim to have developed a comprehensive overview of city engagement that would include all African intermediary cities. However, building on desktop research and background conversations with local and national governments, NGOs, international organisations, and African research institutes we gathered information on around 20 cities. Ensuring a geographic balance, we then invited 15 representatives from these cities to the Equal Partnerships workshop at the Africities conference, where we conducted background conversations to verify the gathered information and determine the interest of the local governments in participating in the Equal Partnerships project. Given that the project does not strive to produce generalisable research findings for all African intermediary cities but rather seeks to explore a specific phenomenon occurring in some African intermediary cities—multi-stakeholder partnerships on migration and displacement—it benefits from theory-guided case selection (Behnke et al., 2010). We, therefore, drew on a most-important-case design to explore possible roles of local governments in multi-stakeholder partnerships on urban migration governance in the six selected cities.

phenomenon of great relevance to their city that could not (sufficiently) be addressed by (inter) national policies and actions alone. In this sense, the Equal Partnerships project made the pragmatic decision to focus on cities with political will to engage on questions of migration to explore what opportunities and challenges local governments interested in these topics would encounter when attempting to work in cooperation with other actors.

In each city, we worked with representatives from the local government, civil society, and research institutes to develop an overarching research design. The objective was to create a research framework that could subsequently guide the fieldwork of the Equal Partnerships teams but would remain flexibly adaptable to different urban realities. In each location, teams of two to three researchers worked with the local government, civil society, and local researchers over three to five weeks to map a broad range of actors addressing questions of migration and displacement in the city. Mapped actors included representatives of the local government and administration, the regional government, national service agencies or local representations of ministries, civil society organisations (local, national, and international), migrant and refugee associations, development agencies, international organisations, and research institutes.

The research teams conducted semi-structured key informant interviews with these actors, focusing first on specific work priorities and target groups of each entity. Subsequently, we asked about the respective actor's cooperation experiences with the local government as well as with other stakeholders, cooperation challenges, gaps, and missing stakeholders and finally offered an opportunity to formulate recommendations for improving cooperative action on migration and displacement in the respective city. We conducted between 15 and 23 interviews per city, amounting to 107 interviews in total. Interviews were held in-person in English or French, recorded and subsequently transcribed. For the analysis of the transcripts, we followed the seven steps of Kuckartz's structuring, qualitative content analysis, using the main topics of our interview questionnaire as deductive main codes and creating inductive sub-codes out of the empirical material (Kuckartz, 2016).

In a second step, all interviewed actors were invited to local workshops that took place at the end of the respective research phase; a total of six local workshops were organised in this context. The objective of these workshops was to bring together all stakeholders and offer actors a space to expand their social networks and develop concrete ideas for creating and strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships in their respective cities. Therefore, each workshop produced three main outcomes:

- a physical map and a table of stakeholders engaging on migration and displacement in the city;
- a three-page summary of the cooperation ideas discussed during the workshop that the Equal Partnerships teams shared with all participants for further feedback the week after the workshop;
- policy recommendations addressed to national and international actors, which form the basis of the Equal Partnerships' knowledge transfer work. These recommendations were, for instance, presented as part of the team's engagement with city partners in the Global Forum on Migration and Development 2024.

3.3 Analysis: Exploring Opportunities and Challenges of Multi-stakeholder Partnerships on Migration and Displacement

In the analytical sections that follow, we present findings focusing on central opportunities and challenges of multi-stakeholder partnerships encountered in the six cities. Drawing on these findings, we subsequently discuss a number of policy recommendations for local, national, and international actors engaging on migration and displacement in African intermediary cities.

3.3.1 Opportunities of Cooperative Action on Migration and Displacement

Drawing on Complementary Strengths in Contexts of Scarcity

Many actors interviewed highlighted that a major motivation to join forces in addressing questions of urban migration and displacement was their interest in benefiting from networks, resources, knowledge, and capacities of other stakeholders. Asked about reasons for working with different partners, civil society actors highlighted the role of public actors in taking policy decisions and providing official documents. Furthermore, NGO representatives mentioned international organisations and development agencies as sources of funding and capacity-building. For instance, in Garissa (Kenya), local NGOs supported the county government's civil registration department with a mobile birth registration service. Even though the county government is officially responsible for issuing birth certificates, the lack of resources impedes the county from hiring sufficient staff. Therefore, the cooperation with local NGOs receiving funding from UNICEF and UNHCR aims to ensure that children born to refugees receive official registration. In the words of an NGO representative:

We have to fund the government officials to facilitate their services. The Chiefs and District Officers have to be present in the registration office when undertaking late birth registrations. [...] When you talk to the registration team and you tell them there's this need coming from this village, they'll tell you, 'we can't go' because they don't have resources or, you know, simple things, like even a car to take them there. (KII6, Garissa, 2022)

Another example for cooperative action comes from Oujda (Morocco), where irregular migrants were required to demonstrate a residence of at least five years to benefit from national regularisation campaigns. Due to the irregularity of their status, providing official proof was rather challenging. To help mitigate this difficulty, a local NGO entered into dialogue with the Wilaya of Oujda (the office of the regional representative of the King). Together, they negotiated a solution in which the NGO would be allowed to provide migrants who had received services from this

NGO over the last five years with an attestation that would be recognised by the authorities (KII12, Oujda, 2022).

In both examples, civil society actors considered their role as building bridges between public institutions and migrant/refugee communities. Furthermore, civil society actors underlined the importance of providing 'reality checks' to public institutions and international organisations aiming to address migration and displacement in cities (Cherunya & Provost, 2023; Stürner-Siovitz & Morthorst, 2023a).

Turning our focus to local and regional governments, we found that interviewed representatives considered their respective national governments as the main actors and holders of resources to address questions of migration and displacement. At the same time, representatives from local and regional governments highlighted that it was often civil society actors who provided direct support to migrants and refugees in their cities.² Therefore, local government representatives underlined the importance of dialogue with civil society actors to benefit from their local expertise and to reach out to migrant and refugee communities. For instance, in Oujda (Morocco) the local government held consultations with NGOs and migrant associations in 2022 to include the topic of 'partnerships and migration' in the municipal development plan 2022–2027 (KII18, KII19, Oujda, 2022).

Due to limited political mandates on migration and displacement, some local and regional governments focus mainly on facilitating interaction between local, national, and international actors rather than developing their own municipal action on migration or displacement. The local government of Sfax has, for instance, collaborated with local migrant associations and civil society actors to connect these with funding opportunities provided via the transnational Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Network (Nicolle & Provost, 2023).

Increasing Awareness for Urban Migration and Displacement Among Local and National Governments

Next to offering access to complementary capacities and knowledge, partnerships may also serve to improve local understanding of migration and displacement situations. Representatives of Oujda's regional government and of local NGOs shared that training and sensitisation activities among subnational governments and national service agencies had led to improved awareness and the inclusion of migration issues into local planning (KII15, Oujda, 2022). In fact, both the Regional Council and the municipality of Oujda addressed migration explicitly in their local development plans. In practice, universal access to healthcare has improved considerably for mobile populations in Morocco over the last years. However, the same cannot be said for access to housing, social services, or the labour market. Furthermore, the focus of local and regional governments on questions of

²In some cities, this was the case because migrants held irregular status or refugees were officially supposed to live in camps or settlements and could therefore not receive support from state institutions or even international organisations while residing in cities.

‘migration and development’ entails that public actors do not address questions of irregular migration at these levels of government (KII14, KII18, KII24, Oujda, 2022).

In cities where local governments do not explicitly engage on migration or displacement, multi-stakeholder dialogues on migration-related topics, such as climate displacement in Saint Louis in Senegal, can nevertheless draw attention to those areas where cooperation is still lacking (European Commission, 2019; USAID, 2020). For instance, in Saint Louis, such dialogues emphasised the cooperation gaps in the treatment of international migrants as opposed to internally displaced persons. In Gulu (Uganda) and Garissa (Kenya), the neglect of urban refugees by public authorities came to the fore: interview partners from local governments and civil society in Garissa and Gulu considered urban refugees ‘invisible’ inhabitants. The implication here is that urban refugees are caught between the official obligation to live in settlements or camps and the reality in which a growing number of refugees have established themselves in these intermediary cities. Refugees come to these cities in the hope of finding economic opportunities but effectively lose protection and support from UNHCR. At the same time, the local governments hosting ‘invisible’ refugees do not receive funding from the national level to improve and expand basic services to serve this part of the population (Morthorst & Stürner-Siovitv, 2023; Cherunya & Provost, 2023). As emphasised by an employee from the city administration of Gulu in Uganda:

Our hands are tied. Of course, we have refugees living in town here, but we have not had any moment to interact with them, because it is not our mandate, it is the office of the Prime Minister to first give us that power, that authority. (KII19, Gulu, 2022)

Building Referral Systems

A third opportunity of multi-stakeholder partnerships is the development of referral systems as seen in the Tunisian city of Sfax. Based on a stakeholder mapping conducted by IOM and Terre d’Asile Tunisie, civil society actors in Sfax established a referral system in 2016, bringing together around ten NGOs, international organisations, and migrant associations (KII4, Sfax, 2021). The referral system’s objectives were to create an overview of existing mandates and services for migrants and refugees, avoid duplication of activities, reduce the time migrants spend being sent from one organisation to another, and strengthen the visibility of local engagement on migration vis-à-vis the local and the national government. Members of the referral system met around once every 2 months. Representatives from the local government and national agencies also took part in some meetings (Nicolle & Provost, 2023). A similar civil-society-led cooperation and referral system exists in Oujda under the name ‘Protection Working Group’, coordinated by the Organisation Marocain des Droits Humains (OMDH) (KII2, KII11, KII20, Oujda, 2022). Both systems have enabled capacity-building on issues such as migration and human trafficking for representatives from NGOs and local administrations. These examples from Sfax and Oujda demonstrate that referral systems can serve local, national, and international actors in cities to share information on fluid mobility situations, political developments, and (inter)national calls for projects. At the same time, such

systems can provide participating stakeholders with an overview of ongoing activities and a mechanism to refer migrants and refugees to the right organisations.

Aligning International Programming with Local Interests

Finally, multi-stakeholder partnerships can serve to align international programming with local interests. Challenges presented by a lack of open communication channels between local and international actors can result in top-down programming that does not take local perspectives sufficiently into account and may even lead to repeated implementation of similar projects at the local level. To align international projects and funding strategies with local priorities and to strengthen the complementarity between different international initiatives, the Regional Council in Oujda has partnered with the Moroccan government and the Wilaya to create a steering committee bringing together representatives from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as well as the three development agencies Enabel (Belgium), Expertise France (France), and the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (Spain). All four actors fund migration programmes in the Oriental region and several of these programmes focus directly on strengthening local government capacities to address migration movements. A representative of the Regional Council in Oujda explained:

The Council of the Oriental, it has set up a single steering committee for the four projects. And the purpose of this steering committee is to coordinate all the activities that are conducted in each project and to avoid duplication of activities. And so there is a complementarity, or let's say, that is the role that the steering committee plays, ensuring a complementarity between the projects. So, if I have, for example, for IOM, they work on health, they do capacity building, in DEPOMI [a migration project funded by ENABEL], they address another theme in the health framework. So, each one complements the other, this is the role that the Oriental Region and the steering committee that has been set up play. (KII14, Oujda, 2022, own translation)

3.3.2 *Challenges of Cooperative Action on Migration and Displacement*

A central challenge—and at the same time the *raison d'être*—for locally-led multi-stakeholder partnerships on urban migration and displacement is local governments' widespread lack of resources and mandates on these issues. We have shown how this scarcity encourages some local governments to take up coordination roles and partner with a wide range of different actors. However, coordination requires resources and the recognition by national and international actors that the local government actually has a role to play in addressing urban migration and displacement. Below, we outline several challenges that complicate the creation or the sustaining of stable multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Mismatching Target Group Definitions, Working Modalities, and Timeframes

Representatives of public institutions and civil society frequently apply diverging definitions when using one and the same terminology. For instance, in Gulu (Uganda) NGOs supporting ‘displaced persons’ referred mostly to Ugandans displaced by the former civil war as well as refugees from neighbouring countries staying in the city. Public representatives also spoke of ‘displaced persons’, but, when asked, limited the definition to displaced Ugandans (KII1, KII4, KII22, Gulu, 2022).

A similar example can be found in Oujda (Morocco), where both civil society actors and public institutions named ‘migrants’ as the main target group of their migration-related activities. However, while civil society actors adopted a broad definition including the Moroccan diaspora, migrants in regular and irregular situations, refugees, and asylum seekers, representatives from the local and regional government focused on the Moroccan diaspora and migrants in regular situations only (KII2, KII12, KII14, KII18, Oujda, 2022). These examples show that diverging definitions do not only set these actors up for misunderstandings but render cooperation between public and civil society actors difficult, especially in areas where official refugee/migrant status matters to access services, housing, or employment.

Furthermore, representatives from local governments and local NGOs emphasised that mismatching working modalities and timeframes pose challenges. A civil society representative in Oujda shared that:

Often there is not the same rhythm [with the public institutions], there is not the same synergy, there are not the same priorities, and it also blocks advocacy on the topics. (KII7, Oujda, 2022, own translation)

While NGOs might adapt their working hours in emergency situations, public institutions can only be reached during official opening hours. In the words of a Moroccan NGO representative:

Civil society is always there with the migrants. What the institutions are lacking is the work outside the working hours. We, the civil society, work both during the day and at night. But the institutions, you know, apart from the office hours, if you call someone, nobody can answer you, except the police, they are obliged to be, because they are the guard system. (KII11, Oujda, 2022, own translation)

At the same time, public representatives in Kenya shared that the dependence of civil society on external funding can limit cooperation options due to bureaucratic processes:

The challenge is government policies; government is very firm in terms of how it wants things to be done. It is not the same in terms of partners, they sometimes have timeframes, donor requirements they have to meet. For example, if a response is happening, as government we need to respond immediately, but our partners have to seek for approvals. It will take like three months for them to come and say this our contribution, but for us, if it is imminent, for example, floods, drought, we respond immediately. (KII1, Garissa, 2022)

The dependence of civil society actors on project-based funding cycles of national or international donors makes cooperation with public institutions even more

difficult when these funding cycles do not match with local planning cycles. For instance, in Garissa (Kenya) the regional government aligns its planning cycle with the national budget year, starting in the summer. However, the budget cycles of international organisations tend to start in December or January.

So, when you [County Government] are planning, they [INGOs] are implementing. So, it is always different, it is not aligned. That is why we really like WFP [World Food Program] because they have synced their planning with the government. So anytime they're planning, we are also planning, when they are implementing, we are also implementing. (KII1, Garissa, 2022)

Lack of Trust, Limited Coordination, or Duplication of Tasks

In several cities, we observed that dialogue and coordination was happening between public actors and between civil society actors but not necessarily across the two groups. Research institutes or international organisations engaging on migration and displacement in these cities also tended to use separate communication channels when engaging with different actor groups. In consequence, limited coordination between civil society and the local government was a major issue in many of the cities under study.

In some cities, we could observe the creation of parallel coordination hubs as in Oujda (Morocco), where the Regional Council has established a steering committee to work with international actors, the local government of Oujda has created a municipal migration unit and civil society actors have co-founded a Working Group on Protection in cooperation with UNHCR and IOM. All these bodies aim to coordinate activities on migration in the city of Oujda. However, upon the initiative of the NGO Pionniers du Changement, public, civil society, and international actors came together to discuss establishing a joint Oujda Migration Network. As an NGO representative explained:

We are creating another network with the institutions. This way, we can create synergies of action between the institutional actors and the civil society in the field of migration and asylum. That way, it makes a lot of things easier for us, in particular activities, there will not be a redundancy of activities. (KII7, Oujda, 2022, own translation)

To tackle a lack of cooperation and dialogue or the creation of parallel coordination hubs it is essential to identify root causes for cooperation gaps. Actors need to clarify whether the main issues are limited interest in cooperation, limited trust, a lack of coordination capacities, or prejudices regarding unwillingness or inability of other actors to cooperate.

Exclusion of Migrants and Refugees from Planning Activities

Migrants and refugees without regular status face the challenge of remaining 'invisible' inhabitants in all six cities. They are thus unable to found formal associations, represent their interests vis-à-vis local governments, or participate in coordination structures of civil society or local governments. A migrant organisation shared that they had planned to support irregular migrants in their integration and develop joint

activities but had been discouraged by the authorities and informed that if they would establish contacts with these communities, the authorities would be unable to continue cooperation and funding support (KII anonymised, 2022). Even migrants and refugees in possession of official residence permits often struggle to participate in urban coordination meetings between different actors addressing migration and displacement due to a lack of contacts, invitations, and language barriers. In the words of a migrant working for an NGO:

The migrant is the main migration actor. So, if you want to develop, whatever, a strategic plan, an evaluation, recommendations, trainings and so on, you must invite migrants from the beginning to the end. So that the migrant is at the heart of the system, the migrant must be involved, associated, from the beginning to the end in any migration programme. [...] Since I came to Morocco, this was my first fight and it still is, because I cannot understand that meetings are held in five-star hotels and in the absence of migrants. I can be in my house or [begging/selling water] at the traffic lights to look for means to have something to eat. At the same time, the authorities and associations are doing activities in hotels, I don't even know what they are talking about. Then they come and tell me: 'Here is this programme; we have tailored it to you.' It's not possible. (KII anonymised, 2022)

Ad Hoc Nature of Partnerships

Where local governments engage in multi-stakeholder cooperation on migration or displacement, the engagement is often driven by individual members of the local councils or administrations. Due to a lack of local mandates, this work is rarely institutionalised, and cooperation remains informal and ad hoc. In consequence, partnerships between local government and other actors may dissolve following local elections, or once a member of the administration leaves the municipality or changes departments. Reflecting on challenges to maintain partnerships between local government and non-city actors beyond election cycles, an official from the county government in Garissa (Kenya) stated:

I think what we need to put in place are very robust handing over mechanisms as a policy. The government doesn't only hand over government activities, the government should also hand over partners. [...] I think it's good if we have a policy that can guide a very comprehensive handing over. [...] How do we ensure that democratic space does not impact on service delivery and partnerships? (KIII, Garissa, 2022)

Limited Local Data on Urban Migration and Displacement

Finally, multi-stakeholder partnerships need qualitative and quantitative data to identify local needs, develop coordinated strategies, and advocate at the national and international levels. However, population data gathered by national institutions is rarely broken down to the local level and is often outdated and frequently incomplete as census data focuses on officially registered foreigners only (Stürner-Siovitz and Morthorst, 2023a). International organisations present another source of data. However, such data is frequently limited to specific target groups related to an organisation's mandate. Collected data may thus not (fully) correspond to the needs of local governments and civil society actors (MC2CM, 2017). At times, data is collected by local actors. For instance, in Oujda (Morocco) NGOs organise regular

outreach activities to migrant communities to gather qualitative and quantitative information about the presence and needs of mobile populations in the city (KII15, Oujda, 2022).

3.4 Recommendations—Strengthening Multi-stakeholder Partnerships on Urban Migration and Displacement

At the Equal Partnerships city workshops, local, national, and international actors discussed these and further challenges and developed recommendations for building sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships. In this final part of the analysis, we present six key recommendations.

3.4.1 Building Trust Among Stakeholders

Local governments willing to engage on urban migration and displacement need to build trust with civil society actors, national governments, and international organisations. The collaborative efforts regarding migration matters in Sfax (Tunisia) and Oujda (Morocco) underscore the importance of involving local NGOs and migrant/refugee associations as valuable allies of local governments (Nicolle & Provost 2023; Stürner-Siovitz & Morthorst 2023a). However, these examples also serve as a reminder that such relationships can only become sustainable if they are built on trust and can endure the changes caused by political election cycles. To ensure continuous cooperation, municipal administrations could formalise partnerships through agreements with NGOs, migrant/refugee associations, and local universities. They should prioritise tangible collaboration, such as the exchange of complementary resources including physical facilities for activities, training capabilities, information regarding calls for projects, and funding opportunities.

In addition, local governments need open lines of communication with national authorities and international organisations that surpass ad hoc cooperation. IOM, UN Habitat, and UNHCR should establish permanent communication frameworks with local governments and assist in institutionalizing local-national dialogues centred on migration and displacement.

3.4.2 Establishing City Focal Points

Even if the primary focus of local administrations is not centred on migration but rather on related subjects such as economic development, housing, or education, establishing a city migration focal point can offer valuable benefits. These focal

points could be assigned the responsibility of gathering pertinent information about institutional initiatives and ensuring that migration and displacement issues are taken into account across all institutional strategies. They could also act as the initial point of contact for stakeholders seeking engagement with the local government regarding migration and displacement questions. Focal points could further facilitate the coordination of local interactions with the national level and foster organisational learning within the city administration. Given the resource constraints faced by local governments in creating such positions, national governments aiming to improve multi-level implementation of national migration and asylum policies should extend their support to interested cities. In parallel, local governments in these countries could receive co-funding from the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (M-MPTF) established by the Global Compact for Migration (GCM).

3.4.3 Situating Migrant and Refugee Perspectives at the Centre of Planning Processes

Across the six cities, migrants and refugees often encountered difficulties in engaging with planning processes and decision-making procedures. In particular, migrants in irregular situations and those urban refugees officially required to reside in refugee camps faced great obstacles when attempting to establish associations, join existing migrant/refugee associations, or access coordination structures involving public authorities. Nonetheless, experiences from civil society and international organisations demonstrate that direct collaboration with migrants and refugees, regardless of their legal status, amplifies the impact of these organisations on the ground (Nicolle & Provost, 2023; Stürner-Siovitv & Morthorst, 2023a). Learning from such approaches, local and regional governments could designate focal points for migrant and refugee communities, arrange consultations and coordination meetings with adequate translation services, establish city council advisory bodies comprised of migrants and refugees, and employ individuals with personal experiences of migration and displacement in municipal offices addressing migration-related challenges such as social cohesion, basic services, and urban planning.

3.4.4 Building International Planning around Local Perspectives and Rethinking Evaluation

Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable ‘urban turn’ within international organisations and development agencies focusing on migration and displacement (Stürner-Siovitv, 2022; Impact Initiatives, 2023). However, local governments are typically only approached to participate in initiatives or invited to respond to project calls after the planning phase is largely completed (Stürner-Siovitv & Morthorst, 2023a). Consequently, international actors miss valuable opportunities to enhance

the effectiveness of their work by incorporating context-specific local knowledge at the planning stage. To mitigate this issue, international organisations and development agencies should allocate a portion of their yearly budgets for consultations with local governments, civil society, and migrant/refugee associations prior to programme development.

From the perspective of interviewed local governments and civil society actors, international actors should also reconsider their evaluation strategies. Rather than focusing solely on metrics such as the number of individuals consulted, reached, or served within a specific project period, international actors should earmark part of their resources for tracking medium-term impacts of their interventions on entire urban communities or municipal areas.

3.4.5 Improving Local Access to (Inter)national Funding

Inclusive local action on migration and displacement requires adequate financial resources. National governments should allocate sufficient funding to cities, covering the needs of the actual (versus officially registered) migrant and refugee population. In addition, international organisations, international financial institutions, and development banks should facilitate local governments' access to loans and grants for institutional funding. Initiatives like the Global Cities Fund exemplify how local governments can spearhead inclusive endeavours when able to tap into international funding sources (MMC, 2023).

3.4.6 Strengthening Bottom-up Data Collection

To enhance local policy planning, international organisations and national statistical offices should disaggregate data down to the urban level. However, given that national census data is only gathered around once a decade in many African countries and primarily focuses on citizens and regular migrants, disaggregating this data will not be enough to ensure a basis for evidence-based urban planning inclusive of migration and displacement.

International organisations and national governments should therefore work with local governments, universities, NGOs, and migrant/refugee associations to create country-specific networks of local data centres. Local data centres could gather data more frequently than national statistical offices and divide data collection into thematic modules corresponding to different areas of urban planning. This approach would cater to the context-specific data requirements of local governments, while also providing comparative data between urban areas that could be shared with the national level. The modular framework would also enable the implementation of distinct data firewalls for different modules.

3.5 Conclusion: Providing Leads for Future Research

This chapter highlighted that researchers and policymakers have paid little attention to migration and displacement in African intermediary cities in the past. Addressing this gap, we have shown that African intermediary cities are evolving into hubs of human mobility in the overarching context of African urbanisation. Before this background, some local governments recognise that they need to take action on migration and displacement despite a local lack of official mandates, resources, and capacities. Arguing that migration and displacement are closely interwoven with core areas of urban policymaking such as basic services, social cohesion, and housing, these local governments seek to partner with national service agencies, civil society associations, research institutes, or international organisations to build multi-stakeholder partnerships. Research with six cities in North, West, and East Africa showed benefits of cooperative urban migration governance including opportunities for local, national, and international actors to draw on complementary resources in contexts of scarcity, raising awareness for urban migration and displacement among local and national governments, building referral systems to support migrants and refugees, as well as aligning international programming with local interests. However, multi-stakeholder partnerships are also limited by numerous challenges, including a lack of trust between local governments and civil society actors, communication gaps between local and national governments, the exclusion of migrants and refugees from planning activities, limited urban data availability as well as the ad hoc nature of cooperative action. This chapter provided a number of recommendations to address such challenges. Building on these findings, future research in urban and migration studies could focus on the question of how cooperative action may evolve from ad hoc initiatives to sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships.

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Chapter 4

Migrant and Refugee Solidarity in Urban South Africa



Leah Koskimaki and Perfect Mazani

4.1 Introduction

Research on the concepts of migrant and refugee solidarity and sanctuary cities has focused on practices and policies of inclusion at the urban scale in the Global North (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Bauder, 2017, 2021, 2022; Darling, 2010, 2021; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Jørgensen & Schierup, 2021; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021). Although it has been argued that the foundations of solidarity in this work have been based in ‘Eurocentric’ philosophical frameworks (Bauder & Juffs, 2020), the notions of urban refugee and migrant protection circulate in various international, transnational, and socio-political frames. Solidarity has multiple dimensions, and its vocabularies, meaning, practice, and manifestations may conceptually differ in Global South contexts (Bauder et al., 2023), where the focus is often on social justice, inclusion, and human rights (Godoy & Bauder, 2022).

This chapter focuses on the themes, practices, vocabularies, and contradictions of migrant solidarity and sanctuary in the context of urban South Africa, which has been a major destination for migrants in the region and the most ‘significant’ in Africa (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). However, despite South Africa being signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, research has shown that restrictive and exclusionary government policies have led to an increase in undocumented and unprotected asylum seekers in the country who struggle with unemployment, xenophobia, housing, and food insecurity (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010; Kavuro, 2022; Khan & Lee, 2018; Moyo & Zanker, 2020; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). Because of widespread xenophobia and discrimination in the workplace, in urban neighbourhoods and townships (Misago, 2017; Tevera, 2013), and by elected officials (Crush, 2022),

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Harald Bauder's (2019) initial review on sanctuary policies in Africa notes that Johannesburg can actually be described as an 'anti-sanctuary' city. For example, despite 'imagining solidarity' with South Africans based on shared suffering and 'moral debt' during apartheid, Zimbabwean migrants felt their stories and voices in South Africa were often left unheard (Morreira, 2010).

Literature on sanctuary and solidarity in Global North contexts focuses on 'municipal solidarity' (Jørgensen & Schierup, 2021; Sabchev, 2022), which often fills in gaps 'in refugee protection left or created by central governments' (Sabchev, 2022, p. 12; see also Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). This 'legal' aspect of urban sanctuary can be seen in Canada where municipal legislative bodies, such as city councils, support initiatives for refugees or in the United Kingdom where municipal lawmakers create supportive spaces (Bauder, 2017). However, in South Africa, most government officials view migrants as a 'drain on public resources' (Landau et al., 2011a) and the Department of Home Affairs exposes migrants and asylum seekers to prolonged waithood and bureaucratic hurdles (Hoag, 2010; Nyakabawu, 2021; Sutton et al., 2011). Tightened restrictions and poorly coordinated refugee policy between national, provincial, and local government levels ends up criminalising asylum seekers and undocumented migrants (Moyo & Botha, 2022). Johnson (2022a, p. 3820) recently showed that the Department of Home Affairs 'took advantage of legal proceedings to stop identifying new locations for RROs' (Refugee Reception Offices) in urban centres (Johnson, 2022a), which then makes it more challenging for asylum seekers to renew their paperwork or formalise their refugee status.

However, while the term 'sanctuary city' has not been applied in South Africa, solidarity practices do emerge in various spaces and ways. Although municipal solidarity may be weak, 'bottom up' approaches are more visible in many Global South contexts (Godoy & Bauder, 2022). In an 'identity-formative' dimension, refugees and migrants are 'constituting themselves as political subjects' in the city and engage in 'grassroots practices' with other actors (Bauder, 2017, p. 8). Practices of 'solidarity' in South African cities emerge in these strands in diverse ways: most prominently at the local level, through civil society, migrant associations, humanitarian organisations, religious networks and faith-based organisations, and informal activist groups. As argued by Bauder et al. (2023, and Chap. 2, volume 1), when rooted in non-Western notions, solidarity may have the potential to promote challenging power imbalances, advance justice, and attain the inclusive and equitable integration of migrants into urban spaces. In addition, solidarity has often been elaborated within and between migrant communities and in various neighbourhoods and economic spaces based on shared precarity. However, as the literature shows, migrant solidarity spaces also can create unwanted obligations (Landau, 2019) and be fragmented or politicised in various ways.

Methodologically, this chapter is largely based on a literature review to draw out and thematically locate and organise these practices in South Africa. The research first explored an already large literature on migrant and refugee challenges in South Africa. We then grouped the literature into themes using keywords in addition to solidarity, such as inclusion, conviviality, social cohesion, social capital, human

rights, and ubuntu. The themes then expanded to examine municipal and civil society support for migrants. The few empirical examples in the chapter are taken from our qualitative research projects: Perfect Mazani's (2023) MA thesis on 'Migration and hospitality in Cape Town: a case of Zimbabwean migrants and refugees' and Leah Koskimaki's ongoing research on 'Tailoring futures, navigating precarity: contemporary South Asian migrant connectivity and solidarity in Cape Town, South Africa.' Both projects were approved by the University of the Western Cape's ethics review board. This literature review and empirical examples share these concepts and local vocabularies of migrant and refugee solidarity and sanctuary in urban South Africa.

4.2 Solidarity as Shared Precarity

Vulnerable migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers share common experiences of precarity; solidarity literature is often discussed in the context of the networks that they form to navigate these challenges. For example, Setrana, Teye, and Yeboah (Chap. 9, volume 1) show how informal networks and social capital help migrants overcome challenges, both collectively and individually, through agency to ensure survival and integration into the urban spaces in Ghana.

In urban South Africa, earlier work argued that migrants built 'ethnic enclaves' within communities for survival, with little evidence, however, for 'mutual solidarity' (Sinclair, 1998). Since then, however, we find rising solidarities *between and amongst* different migrant communities in building social capital or developing networks for survival strategies (Amisi, 2006; Hlatshwayo & Wotela, 2018; Hungwe, 2015; Mazani, 2023; Owen, 2015; Rugunanan, 2022). Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner (1993, p. 1325) have referred to this notion as 'bounded solidarity', which they show as developing 'out of the situational reaction of a class of people faced with common adversities.' Rugunanan (2022, pp. 26–27) has argued that in Johannesburg solidarity may arise amongst migrant groups in a 'bounded space' or neighbourhood when the 'need arises'. She terms this 'contingent' and 'instrumental' solidarity through which migrants 'draw upon resources from each other in the form of employment, loans, sharing of accommodation and labour', which often exclude South Africans.

Loren Landau (2018), however, calls these 'communities of convenience' in which, contrary to urban solidarity literature, migrant friendships and social relationships are often fragmented or eschewed due to migrants' transience. In informal city spaces where formal documents 'do little' to get access to services, Landau (2019) argues that migrants employ 'tactical agency' by 'shunning solidarity' to avoid responsibilities and to find new opportunities. Sometimes migrants seek to distance themselves from obligations or even abuse in kin networks (Hungwe, 2015). Loren Landau and Iriann Freemantle (2022) argue that in Johannesburg, migrants develop a flexible 'tactical cosmopolitanism' that allows them to access inclusion and form connections without being 'bounded'. Migrant social

connections are not without tensions and may be formed out of ‘desperation’ and thus ‘remain precarious’ (Chekero, 2023, p. 381).

Nonetheless, migrants do also search for enduring connections in the places where they live or work and build relationships for reasons beyond their own survival. For example, Nomkhosi Mbatha and Leah Koskimaki (2023) discuss friendships amongst South Africans and migrant street traders in an informal market in Durban. They argue that the informal space of the market allowed for affective and material exchanges between migrant groups and South Africans, developing conviviality and friendships over long periods of time together (Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023). Caroline Kihato’s (2013, p. 127) research with migrant women in Johannesburg shows that solidarity is not necessarily mediated by the ‘state’ or configured as ‘civil society’; this solidarity extends beyond sanctuary and arises in their liminality and in-betweenness (Kihato, 2013). As solidarity also arises ‘in moments or conjunctures’ and ‘crisis’ (Jørgensen & Schierup, 2021, p. 848), in the absence of government support during the Covid-19 pandemic (Mukumbang et al., 2020), deeper solidarities and togetherness developed within and between migrant groups (Chekero, 2023; Koskimaki et al., [forthcoming](#); Mulu & Mbanza, 2021; Tefera et al., 2023).

Migrants in South Africa also join or create community associations and groups for social support. Home Town Associations (HTAs) and diasporic organisations in South Africa assist with social support, burials, and remittances. Membership is based not only among similar nationalities but even formed along specific regional, ethnic, and linguistic and village affiliations (Atabongwong, 2022; see Setrana et al., Chap. 9, volume 1 for similar networks in urban Ghana). HTAs are popular with the Cameroonian community (Nyamnjoh, 2017b) and ‘presuppose the existence of interdependence/solidarity in South Africa’ (Nyamnjoh et al., 2022, p. 33). Such HTAs become means ‘for conviviality, personhood and interdependence to maintaining a sense of ontological security’ (Nyamnjoh, 2017b, p. 248). However, Cameroonian migrants often move between multiple different associations based on their needs rather than emotional sense of belonging due to their precarity (Atabongwong, 2022). The Cameroonian associations also are fragmented due to ‘ethnic and regional differences, class consciousness as well as disparate political and social orientations’ (Pineteh, 2011, p. 402). Henrietta Nyamnjoh et al.’s (2022) research with Congolese women in South Africa shows they lack similar HTAs and other organisations for support, hence turn to prayer and religion in a ‘solidarity of hope’ (Nyamnjoh et al., 2022, p. 37). This situation often leaves Congolese migrants on the ‘peripheries of the social capital order’ where they cannot access resources outside their community networks (Masuku & Rama, 2020a, p. 93).

4.3 Hospitality, Conviviality and Human Rights

Solidarity is also ‘generative of political subjectivities and collective identities’ (Jørgensen, 2024). The literature on South Africa focuses on these collective identities through terms such as social cohesion, inclusion, conviviality, and localised

themes of ubuntu. Hospitality towards migrants is elaborated through 'human rights'. Drawing from Fabio Baggio's (2007) discussion of moral obligation towards migrants, Mulugeta Dinbabo and Sergio Carciotto (2015) advocate for a paradigm in South Africa to include 'the moral duty of many religions to be supportive towards disadvantaged people' and a 'principle of philanthropy and solidarity.'

Attention in South Africa has been on the concept of ubuntu, which has been described as a possible philosophical orientation to recognise one's humanness and combat xenophobia (Kaungu, 2021). Ubuntu has been described as a potential example to move beyond 'Eurocentric' notions of solidarity (Bauder et al., 2023, Chap. 2, volume 1) and is a decolonising discourse (Moyo, 2021), dislodged from Eurocentric notions of cosmopolitanism (Ngcoya, 2015). Simangalisso Kumalo (2018, p. 161) describes ubuntu as 'hospitality, generosity, care and community, and an acknowledgement of co-dependence and co-existence.' It can also reflect the underlying reciprocity and social capital in building harmonious relationships between migrants and South Africans (Isike, 2017). Ubuntu has been described, for example, as 'interdependence and togetherness' amongst Malawians who relied on neighbours and other networks for support during the Covid-19 pandemic (Tefera et al., 2023). Ubuntu has been critiqued, however, in that migrants, especially African migrants, continue to be told to 'go home' (Amusan & Mchunu, 2017). Elina Hankela (2015, p. 375) problematises the academic discussion on ubuntu that 'concentrates on relationships between persons and a community, of which the person in question is, is not, or could be a part', noting that the 'rule of reciprocity points at a clear expectation that the other group should behave in a way that is worthy of our group's practise of ubuntu.' Ubuntu has also been misused or misconstrued in various ways, such as being glossed over by capitalist groups or to relegate responsibility from the state onto communities (Ngcoya, 2015).

Conviviality also emerges in the literature as a practice of collective care in migrant communities. Monique Pozzo and Halleh Ghorashi (2022, p. 5) describe conviviality as 'innovative co-creation' and juxtapose this concept with integration, which at times can be 'one-directional adaptation'. This situation is a starting point in which we explore the possibility for inclusion and connection in multi-ethnic spaces in urban South Africa, as Ala Alhourani (2017) describes of the diverse and 'collective' space of Bellville, Cape Town, where Somalis, Pakistanis, Ethiopians, and other migrants converge. Francis Nyamnjoh (2017a) calls conviviality a 'currency' and a recognition of being incomplete, and thus a reaching out. He argues that the experience of transience and temporality leads people to 'maximise collective endeavours' (Nyamnjoh, 2017a, p. 261). Conviviality and collective social networks are thus a survival strategy for refugees (Chekero, 2023; Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023, 2024). Tamuka Chekero and Shannon Morreira's (2020, p. 34) study investigated conviviality through a Shona concept of *hushamwari*, which can translate as friendship, and the Tsonga idea of *kuhanyisana* (helping one another to live) to 'create spaces for conviviality and mutuality across ostensible difference.' Odette Murara's (2020) research with African migrants in a township in Cape Town shows examples of respect for migrant cultural practices and how small migrant-run restaurants and barbershops as well as Pentecostal churches act as spaces of

conviviality and networking. Pan-Africanism emerges as a bridge in such spaces; Kezia Batisai (2022, p. 19) has argued that the Black African experience in the Global South requires a theorising of ‘shared experiences, connectedness and commonalities amongst blacks irrespective of nationality.’

4.4 Municipal Solidarity

Despite these collectives, shared precarities, and possibilities across migrant groups and with South Africans, migrants still face challenges in obtaining municipal support. Interestingly, Rene Kreichauf and Margit Mayer (2021) offer examples from Global North contexts to argue that the notion of a solidarity city has focused on municipalities and governmental support at the city level to the elision of civil society and political mobilisation. In South Africa, one sees the opposite. Municipal support on the local level has been weak for migrants, and xenophobia also has been politically mobilised (Misago, 2017; Moyo & Zanker, 2020). A 2011 report on the municipal role in migrant support argues that while the national and provincial governments are responsible for ‘access to shelter, health care, education, and economic opportunities’, municipal actors who administer these tasks have little information about, or trust in, statistics about their migrant constituents (Landau et al., 2011a, p. 7). They thus they fail to address social conflict, marginalisation, and lack of access to services. Furthermore, ‘noncitizens are not regularly invited to participate in community policing forums, stakeholder forums, residents’ associations meetings, or meetings hosted by local ward councillors’ (Landau et al., 2011b, p. 92). Another study in four small South African municipalities also shows that municipalities have inadequate support for migrants, noting that ‘poor data, bias, institutional incentives and, ironically, democratic practices are working against long-term planning for human mobility’ (Landau et al., 2013, p. 114; see also Mapitsa & Landau, 2019 on capacity-building of municipal actors).

The debates over municipal solidarity draw a focus to practices on the local scale (Bauder, 2017). A migrant’s choice to settle in specific regions or neighbourhoods are important in their search for a sense of community and safety. Ethnic or diverse migrant communities can serve as a safe haven for migrants because of the resources and sense of security they provide (Rugunanan, 2015). Perfect Mazani’s (2023) research showed many Zimbabwean migrants felt ‘safe’ in their area of the township of Joe Slovo in Cape Town, a space with many migrants and hospitable churches. Darshan Vigneswaran’s (2020, p. 569) discussion of ‘protection’ in the Hillbrow area of Johannesburg may help to further explain a political discourse of sanctuary as ‘protection’ in urban South Africa. Because of distrust and lack of faith in police to assist with crime, informal mobilisation of community members in the form of street patrolling groups in lower class neighbourhoods contrasts with private security patrols in wealthier areas in South Africa’s unequal cities. Vigneswaran (2020, p. 569) explains that while ‘the concepts of “security” and “safety” posit the

idea of a realisable state' that would ideally provide protection from violence, these are in fact unequally structured.

Loren Landau et al. (2011a) do offer some examples of hospitality towards migrants in Johannesburg, such as 'initiatives to foster and encourage migrants' participation in dialogue platforms, including the Migrants' Help Desk, created in 2007, and the Johannesburg Migrants' Advisory Committee, established in 2010.' They caution, however, that such engagement is done 'simply to legitimate decisions made through other means.' Lere Amusan and Sphiwe Mchunu (2017) write that for migrants to be integrated into local government, they must be able to be involved in community projects. In urban spaces where migrants and citizens alike are equally vulnerable, the proposed notion of 'stealth humanitarianism' (Kihato & Landau, 2017) emerges, involving 'tactical political alliances with community-based organizations and local actors.' Here, humanitarian organisations might make themselves less visible and work indirectly 'to avoid political ire and popular backlash' (Kihato & Landau, 2017, p. 408).

4.5 Civic Solidarity

While shared social solidarities arise within and between migrants, we turn our focus to role of civil society, community and activist organisations as an aspect of urban sanctuary—or 'civic solidarity' (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Jørgensen, 2024; Jørgensen & Schierup, 2021). Salifu and Jørgensen (Chap. 5, this volume) underline the importance of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and local authorities in shaping solidarity infrastructure in Copenhagen and Accra, while giving local actors an active role in refugee inclusion despite national policy restrictions. South Africa has no restriction on the formation of refugee associations or civil society organisations (Mpeiwa, 2018). Harald Bauder's (2022, p. 107) review of literature on Johannesburg observes that 'the legal and identity dimensions of urban solidarity seem to be absent' and that 'civil-society actors rather than municipal institutions are implementing urban solidarity measures.' Jay Johnson's (2022b, p. 10) review of civil society litigation to open Refugee Reception Offices in Cape Town and Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) is a 'constitutive strategy contextualizing international and national rights within specific historical and social contexts in cities.' However, the Department of Home Affairs 'has a performative relationship with civil society who try to keep them in check' (Moyo & Zanker, 2020). When the DHA circulated a draft refugee policy for feedback, Mukondeleli Mpeiwa (2018, p. 14) observes that NGOs and refugee association feedback was not considered.

In North American and European contexts urban solidarity practices have included municipal partnerships with NGOs (Bauder, 2019). Sikanyiso Masuku and Sharmila Rama (2020b) identified some collaborative partnerships between civil society and the state, such as with various governmental departments, but noted that civil society groups mostly work autonomously or through litigation. This exposes

the limits of civil society groups to navigate the sphere of migrant and refugee support. Leah Koskimaki's ongoing research with South Asian migrants in Cape Town and earlier evidence by Yoon Jung Park and Pragna Rugunanan (2010) show that many such civil society groups are not frequented by South Asian newcomers. Koskimaki heard expressions of mistrust of these organisations, and rather a reliance on friendship and religious networks. Often an 'ethics of hospitality' and care for migrant groups in South Africa thus requires an 'integrated suite of socio-ecological systems' that include NGOs, faith-based organisations, and others in the 'process and provision of protection' (Perumal, 2015, p. 86). A 'rights-based approach' in South Africa would involve international organisations and civil society organisations toward upholding the rights of migrants (Dinbabo & Carciotto, 2015).

We cannot list the names of all migrant and refugee NGOs here; rather, we offer some empirical examples from literature that directly refers to practices of specific community-based organisations as well as self-organisation and political mobilisation by refugee and migrant groups. In Cape Town, Denys Uwimpuhwe and Greg Ruiters (2018) reviewed 'asylum seekers' collective self-organisation' with 11 diverse organisations with Somalis, Congolese, and Rwandans, including hometown associations, heritage associations, cultural groups, and NGOs. One leader of a Congolese association, the Democratic Republic of Congolese Association in South Africa (DRCASA), stated they mediate 'between migrants and citizens with UNHCR and the City of Cape Town' and noted the 'interclass solidarity between Congolese in townships and the well-off in suburbs' (Uwimpuhwe & Ruiters, 2018, p. 1129). Their research argues that migrant associations often have different aims but are less fragmented than some literature may show; they also describe that many refugee leaders 'spoke of pan-africanism and black solidarity' (Uwimpuhwe & Ruiters, 2018, p. 1134). The Somali Association of South Africa (SASA), for instance, offers social and legal support and has mediated disputes between South African communities and Somali migrants (Jinnah, 2010). Some refugee organisations, especially within the Congolese community, regularly organise protests and other political marches (Mpeiwa, 2018). Overall, leadership structures in various refugee organisations play a key role in protecting, representing and advocating for their own communities (Dinbabo et al., 2021; Koskimaki & Mukafuku, 2024).

NGOs also actively implement programmes for social cohesion with South African citizens and refugees (Masuku & Rama, 2020b; Adonis Musati Project, n.d.). Often NGOs and civil society rely on litigation to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers to work and access social grants (Okbandrias, 2023). The Scalabrini Centre in Cape Town provides legal, social, and employment services to ensure the rights of people on the move (Scalabrini, n.d.), and the associated Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa (SIHMA) conducts research that contributes to informed policymaking and promotes the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees in Africa. During Covid-19, the Scalabrini Centre also litigated for government support to be opened to migrants (Kavuro, 2021). The African Diaspora Forum (ADF) offers a venue for migrants to interact, mediates disputes between communities in South Africa and migrants, and also promoted awareness regarding migrants

with the police in Yeoville, Johannesburg (Katsaura, 2015). The Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa, a network of civil society and other organisations, also fights for the rights of migrants and refugees in South Africa (CoRMSA, n.d.) Moreover, teacher training in schools has included the ‘human rights’ of migrant students, combating xenophobia, and solidarity networks such as the Education Indaba Forum in the mid-2000s (Hlatshwayo & Vally, 2014). We further find associational life on small scales, e.g. the Yeoville Dinner Club in Johannesburg brings together migrants and locals to share food and stories to encourage social harmony and dispel inaccurate stereotypes (Nzayabino, 2010). New research is being conducted on working-class solidarities, political mobilisation, and transnational and local scales for and amongst migrant groups (Garba & Awumbila, n.d.) Mariama Awumbila, et al. (2023, p. 720) focus on how migrants in the Global South build solidarity amongst themselves and ‘with social movements, working-class organisations, and other civil society actors.’

Finally, workers and unions in South Africa have shown solidarity toward migrant workers. The *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (COSATU) has held workshops on xenophobia with NGOs and migrant organisations to ‘build solidarity between the African migrants’ (Hlatshwayo, 2021, p. 576). Despite the union’s apprehension over workers’ visa status, Mondli Hlatshwayo (2012) offers multiple examples of unions organising, supporting, and showing solidarity and fighting xenophobia. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has also showed sensitivity to discrimination and, as Janet Munakamwe’s (2018, 2022) research revealed, communities ‘practice Ubuntu (meaning Pan Africanism at local level) and treat each other equally irrespective of tribe or nationality’ in the mines and offered ‘protection’ (Munakamwe, 2018, p. 247).

4.6 Religious Spaces as Sanctuary Spaces?

The phrase ‘urban sanctuary’ refers to an initiative that is welcoming, provides migrants and refugees with some protection as well as support with food, housing, and clothing, and shares spaces within communities (Bauder, 2019). Its origins can be traced to religious forms of welcome (Bauder, 2017), but often in a ‘pastoral relationship where somebody—the church or local authorities—offers the dependent protection and sanctuary’ (Jørgensen & Schierup, 2021, p. 850). Given this religious aspect of sanctuary in the European context, this section explores how religious institutions in South African cities may act as places where migrants can find sanctuary, safety, and community. Federico Settler and Buhle Mpfu’s review of the literature showed a relationship between migration, religion, and ‘social responsibility’, and they further argued that religion can be a ‘source of meaning-making and of belonging that transcends ideas of citizenship and nation’ (Settler & Mpfu, 2017, p. 19).

Churches are one of the first places that Christian migrants enter in South Africa and hence are spaces of interculturality (Kumalo, 2018). Often migrant-dominated

churches involve various nationalities and can become ‘transformative agents in South Africa’s xenophobic contexts’ (Swart et al., 2021, p. 168). In South Africa, church spaces provide access to networks and social capital (Hungwe, 2015; Kumalo, 2018; Mazani, 2023; Mpofu, 2018; Murara, 2020; Nzayabino, 2010; Owen, 2015) to help access information about housing and employment opportunities, spiritual guidance, and making new friends. These networks formed at church frequently become stronger than those formed at home because people often put their faith in the church first— ‘church ties over family ties’ (Hungwe, 2015, p. 206). Hospitality shown to Zimbabwean churchgoers in South Africa ‘offers protection and respect to strangers’ and maintains ‘fundamental moral bonds among the Church members’ (Chovere, 2011, p. 79). Many of the migrants and refugees who were interviewed in research by Perfect Mazani (2023) in Cape Town claimed that because they believe that their faith in Jesus Christ will always make their enemies feel pity for them and protect them, they are less afraid of xenophobia or any hostilities that are rumoured to be taking place in some parts of South Africa. Any person can find comfort in the church. However, rather than providing legal advice on documentation, the church often focuses on praying for undocumented members so that God will protect them from the police (Hungwe, 2015).

Churches also provide sanctuary. A well-known example is the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which for many years offered sanctuary and assistance to refugees, especially after the xenophobic attacks in 2008 (Hankela, 2015; Kuljian, 2013). Its former bishop, Bishop Verryn, described the church as a space of welcome for all, according to principle of *Paballo Ya Batho* (caring for the people) (Chisale, 2016, p. 3). Although the church became a space for refugees following the sentiment of ubuntu, Elina Hankela (2015, p. 375) shows that ubuntu was limited at the CMM through a ‘demand for reciprocity or self-survival.’ In 2019, refugees in Cape Town participated in a sit-in protest against xenophobia at the UNHCR office, and the nearby Methodist church also opened its doors to hundreds of refugees who remained inside for some time until evicted due to political factions and conflicts (Kiewit, 2019). Because of the Covid-19 lockdown, the refugees were eventually forcibly removed and placed in tented sites where they lived in challenging conditions (Frank, 2023).

However, church spaces can also be contradictory. As Buhle Mpofu’s (2018, p. 108) research in Johannesburg shows, the church can be a ‘hostile’ space for migrants who felt shame, vulnerability, and ‘struggle for recognition and human dignity’. Loren Landau (2014, p. 372) argues that while church spaces offer help and support for migrants, many generate ‘antipolitical tenets of belonging’ and actually ‘undermine the possible emergence of a territorially bound or state-centered solidarity.’ Further, narratives of prosperity and expected monetary donations created hierarchies and mediated their sense of belonging in the church (Nishimwe, 2022). Migrant Pentecostal churches in Johannesburg also offer ‘pastoral desire for urban “social” solidarity’ but remain as a ‘nostalgia for community’ without fully achieving it (Katsaura, 2017, p. 249–250).

Muslim networks, brotherhoods, and the mosque also provide spaces of migrant solidarity (Alhourani, 2017; Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023; Vawda, 2009, 2017).

Muslim Malawians in Durban often receive assistance from local Muslim welfare agencies and business elites (Vawda, 2009). They also work and form friendships with other Muslim migrant street traders and South Africans in the informal economic and social spaces of the market (Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023). Other research in Durban shows that ‘Muslim societies extend a sense of welcome to migrants’ (Kirby et al., 2021, p. 298). In Cape Town, ‘culturally diverse Somalis’ in Bellville build a sense of community through Islam (Alhourani, 2017). Pragna Rugunanan’s (2015, p. 76) work in Fordsburg, a diverse migrant enclave, shows that the South African Indian community is somewhat fractured, yet the ‘shared historical links and religious sanctuary experience some form of safety and protection from possible xenophobic attacks.’

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored some of the practises, vocabularies, and contradictions that emerge in the research related to migrant and refugee solidarity and sanctuary in urban South Africa. While South Africa’s cities are a major migration destination in the region, research has shown that migrants face xenophobia and challenges in accessing employment, healthcare, and other services. Bureaucratic delays and obstacles at the Department of Home Affairs exacerbate the difficulties of vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers. Literature in the Global North describes how ‘municipal solidarity’ at the urban scale can fill in the gaps in national refugee protection policies. However, municipal assistance for vulnerable migrants is often inadequate in South African cities.

In South Africa, solidarity arises in different contexts, and usually appears locally through migrant associations, the involvement of civil society, humanitarian organisations, religious spaces, activist groups, and political networks. Solidarities also emerge within migrant communities based on the shared experiences of precarity. Religious spaces play a prominent role in the sanctuary narrative by providing refuge, legal assistance, and humanitarian support to refugees. The research does, however, recognise the dual character of these environments, noting that migrants may also negotiate hostility or care economies. In addition to solidarity, terminology such as inclusion and cohesion, conviviality, human rights, Pan-Africanism and ubuntu describe the connectivity and relationships that can arise between and within migrant and refugee groups. Ubuntu, which is defined as ‘interdependence and togetherness’, has been explored as a possible philosophical stance to combat xenophobia and transcend Eurocentric ideas of solidarity. Further, references to Pan-Africanism can inspire collaboration, political alliances, and respect. However, the research recognises the challenges that arise when relying on solidarity from below; within community spaces migrants may also experience ongoing exclusion, political and social differences, undesired obligations, and fragmentation.

Although South Africa does not have ‘sanctuary’ or solidarity cities such as found in Europe or North America, there is a hopeful range of community actors

striving to make communities more welcoming to migrants as well as grassroots networks of stakeholders who assist migrants to cultivate solidarity. Bringing the literature together in this chapter shows the continued need to deepen national, regional, and local networks made up of scholars, practitioners, trade unions, civil society organisations, activists, and social movements in combating inaccurate representations and advancing the rights and welfare of migrants. In multiple global contexts, municipal actors and leaders play a role in building these ‘migration-related city networks’ (Lacroix, 2022), and hence further localised studies of opportunities for alliance-building are continually needed. An example from Cape Town is the suggestion to also attend to potential alliances with ‘powerful networked interests that govern a city’ (Ruiters et al., 2020, p. 31).

Overall, at times this motivates a move away from a ‘state-centered’ narrative of rights and towards the concept of ‘stealth humanitarianism’ (Kihato & Landau, 2017) as a means for new solutions. Ongoing attention to scale and local research is also required, as differences exist between cities and even urban neighbourhoods in post-Apartheid cities with unique histories, migrant groups, relationships, and access to social capital that may allow or hinder the formation of migrant solidarity. Creating a safer and supportive environment for migrants and refugees in South African cities also requires building on these already-established foundations, encouraging partnerships, networks, and diverse alliances for solidarity and human rights.

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Chapter 5

Formal and Informal Solidarity

Infrastructures in Copenhagen and Accra



Mashudu Salifu  and Martin Bak Jørgensen 

5.1 Introduction

The debate on urban sanctuary or solidarity cities has been on the ascendancy in recent decades among politicians, policymakers, academic scholars, and media. Indeed, the post-World War II era has witnessed the largest influx of refugees and displaced persons worldwide. Also, many people are migrating to cities for a better livelihood or to escape extreme danger at their places of origin (UN-Habitat, 2020). Thus, the global urban population has grown exponentially, from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018. In the Global South, Africa's growing urbanisation is attributed to migration, with rural-to-urban migration accounting for over half the growth of cities. By 2050, 60% of Africa's population, or 2.5 billion people, will be living in cities (Stürner-Siovitz, 2022). Consequently, African cities, including Accra, are confronted with multiple challenges, such as increases in slum-dwellers, rising urban poverty, and a lack of clear policy direction (Setrana et al., Chap. 9, volume 1; Arku & Marais, 2021). These developments often result in contradictory reactions—exclusionary and solidarity practices by various actors, whether on local, national, or international scales. By comparing sanctuary or solidarity infrastructure in a global context, we examine the structural commonalities and differences between the Global North (GN) Copenhagen, Denmark, and the Global South (GS) Accra, Ghana, towards refugees and vulnerable migrants. For instance, the 2015 refugee crisis implanted two competing contexts in Europe. On the one hand, there has been an increase in restrictive and exclusionary European and national migration policies and practices. On the other hand, local authorities, and civil society organisations have been promoting refugee-friendly measures from below, sometimes in direct defiance of national policies (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019).

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Similar observations are seen in other regions, especially in North and Latin America, where sanctuary and solidarity cities contest to provide solidarity and urban citizenship to refugees and precarious migrants amidst the federal authorities' restrictive and exclusionary policies (Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018). We will return to the overall discussion on what communalities and differences entail in practice in the conclusion.

There is a considerable literature on urban sanctuary policies (Bauder, 2017; Lippert & Rehaag, 2012), sanctuary cities in North America (Bruce & Crettex, Chap. 8, this volume; Bauder, 2021), solidarity cities in Europe (Jørgensen & Schierup, 2021; Agustín, 2020; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019), and urban sanctuary policies in Africa (Koskimaki & Mazani, Chap. 4, this volume; Stürner-Siovit, 2022; Bauder, 2019). Although this edited volume offers a global perspective on urban sanctuary and solidarity (Agustín & Jørgensen, Chap. 11, volume 1), there is still a gain in comparing urban sanctuary in a global context. Therefore, this study examines the structural commonalities and differences in municipal policies and practices for integrating refugees and precarious migrants in Accra, Ghana, and Copenhagen, Denmark. The two cities provide interesting comparative case studies due to their distinct geographical locations, migration contexts, historical backgrounds, and adopted policies and practices. We explore the following research question: What are the structural commonalities and differences in urban and municipal policies and practices in integrating refugees and precarious migrants in the Global North (Denmark) and Global South (Ghana)? The comparison allows us to investigate both how concepts 'travel' and how concepts mainly drawing on Western frames of references developed in the Global North may—or may not—be given new meaning in the Global South.

This chapter presents how refugees and precarious migrants' policies and practices are conceived and implemented in Copenhagen and Accra. We also shed light on how the GS, especially Accra, Ghana, contributes to the development of urban sanctuary or solidarity infrastructure, making this chapter a good guide for students, academic scholars, and policymakers.

5.2 Study Context: Copenhagen, Denmark, and Accra, Ghana

Denmark is a Scandinavian country of 5.8 million people that has five administrative regions and 98 municipalities. Denmark was one of the first signatories to the 1951 refugee convention, and a state party to both the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions—demonstrating the country's strong commitments over the years to end statelessness (UNHCR, 2021). In recent years, however, the Danish immigration and integration policy framework towards refugees and precarious migrants has been described as restrictive and cited as an inspiration for the 'new' style of

integration embarked on by other European countries in the 2000s (Jørgensen & Thomsen, 2016).

Copenhagen is the capital city of Denmark. The population is about 1.87 million. The city has 29 municipalities, including Copenhagen. The integration Act in 1999 until April 2016 exempted the City of Copenhagen of hosting refugees, but in December 2015, the government introduced a new refugee distribution formula across the 98 municipalities, thereby changing the previous mandate. Therefore, Copenhagen City adopted its model of reception and integration of refugees from the Danish immigration service. Moreover, the city council in 2017 and 2018 entered agreements with the Danish Refugee Council, Association of New Danes, Neighbourhood Mothers, and the Red Cross (Copenhagen Municipality, 2021) on how to match refugees with volunteers and to enhance their integration into the economic and social life of the city.

Ghana is in a very different context from Denmark. It is the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to have gained independence on March 6, 1957 from the European/British colonial rule. Based on the 2021 population and housing census, the population is approximately 30.8 million. Ghana, like other African countries, underwent a chequered political history post-independence, experiencing democracy and coup d'états. In 1992, Ghana returned to civilian rule by adopting a new constitution. Since then, the country has gone through a transition of governments, from voting as a political culture to electing political leaders. The country is a beacon of democracy in the sub-region (Boafo-Arthur, 2008). Administratively, Ghana is divided into 16 regions and 261 metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies (MMDAs). Ghana has ratified both the 1951 and 1967 refugee Conventions. Equally, Ghana is hosting refugees from over 35 countries in the world (Ghana Refugee Board, 2019).

Accra is the capital city of Ghana and has 29 municipalities. According to the 2021 population and housing census, the population is 5,455,962 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). It is the most urbanised region in the country, with 87.4% of its total population living in urban centres. Notably, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) are located and working towards shaping the city and national policies and practices, including those for refugees' and vulnerable migrants' integration (Darkwa et al., 2006). In 2021, the UNHCR-Ghana, along with other relevant bodies, opened a new Refugee Community Centre in Accra. The centre is a safe public space where refugees of diverse backgrounds meet for skills development, livelihood activities, and language training, among others (Folley, 2021).

In both Accra and Copenhagen, the city is seen as an important arena for enacting urban citizenship and solidarity for refugees and vulnerable migrants (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). While in Accra solidarity practices are driven by UNHCR-Ghana, CSOs, the community (Setrana et al., Chap. 9, volume 1), and less by municipality involvement, the Copenhagen initiative thrives on a strong city authority collaboration with CSOs in promoting solidarity and integration towards refugees and vulnerable migrants. With this in mind, we could argue that both cities are developing innovative measures for the socio-economic and cultural integration of refugees and precarious migrants.

5.3 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework and Infrastructures of Solidarity

As already indicated, there is a growing literature on the study of urban sanctuary or solidarity cities (Ambrosini, 2021; Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018). Urban sanctuary is a complex phenomenon because its practices by different actors in cities in the Global North and Global South entail a wide range of meanings and visions and depend on various factors, such as the political and administrative systems and the goals of activists in supporting refugees and precarious migrants. Stefanie Kron and Henrik Lebuhn (2020, p. 29) note that solidarity city policies and practices are ‘not the result of top-down policy making but are put onto cities’ agendas by social movement actors and through strong bottom-up mobilizations.’ In the same vein, urban solidarity manifests in both top-down and bottom-up policies and practices by various urban actors in response to local conditions and political strategies (Bauder, 2021; Agustín & Jørgensen, Chap. 11, volume 1). These arguments underscore the crucial role of city authorities and CSOs critical in understanding the evolving urban sanctuary or solidarity cities. Serin Houston (2019) argues that we should embrace the concept of solidarity as a socio-spatial heterogeneity, not as a binary state of being. In other words, efforts must be made to avoid an essentialist notion of solidarity but to see it as a contingent and temporary phenomenon that should be understood in its socio-political context. Solidarity thus is a set of interwoven activities at various scales—urban, regional, national, and international. Consequently, it is both spatial and relational. Indeed, urban sanctuary or solidarity develops as an array of transformative and transversal practices by various actors, solidarity repertoires, and consensus-building over an extended period (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). In addition, Nyers (2019) conceptualises solidarity as the process of bridging the gap between citizens and undocumented migrants.

Studies have revealed that a variety of actors are either supporting or opposing the solidarity city movements. These actors, among others, comprise municipal authorities, national authorities (such as police and immigration officials), CSOs, refugees, and vulnerable migrants. During and after the 2015 European refugee crisis, it became evident that the national and municipal authorities are not the only actors shaping the urban sanctuary for refugees and vulnerable migrants. Both registered and unregistered NGOs and CSOs, along with professional activists, refugees, and precarious migrants, have equally assumed important roles in contributing to the solidarity city initiatives. In this regard, cities serve as crucial arenas for the negotiation, enactment, and execution of solidarity policies and practices for refugees and precarious migrants (Ambrosini, 2021). Municipal authorities with limited constitutional mandates could act for or against national state authorities in their quest to promulgate policies toward the integration of refugees and precarious migrants (Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018). For the purpose of this study, we consider municipal authorities and CSOs as the main actors guiding our quest to understand Copenhagen and Accra solidarity policies and practices.

In this chapter, we link solidarity with the reconceptualisation of migration infrastructures (Lin et al., 2017; Amelung et al., 2020). Migration infrastructures have been used to explore assemblages of material, technological, discursive, and bureaucratic infrastructures that, in interaction with actors and institutions, shape mobility, settlement, and exit (Meeus et al., 2019). A shortcoming in this conceptualisation, however, is that migration infrastructures have focused mainly on the role of brokerage and social networks in relation, for instance, to labour migration and to mobilities at large. There is little attention to, firstly, civil society actors or non-state actors; secondly, the internal dynamics, politicisations, tensions between actors, and forms of governance on different scales within the specific infrastructure; and thirdly, the kinds of interrelations that constitute a city-based politics of welcome. Therefore, taking the idea of infrastructure to the local scale—here understood as the municipality—allows us to develop an understanding of *infrastructures of solidarity* to identify the discursive, legal, and material aspects of politics of welcome aimed at precarious migrants and advance both theoretical knowledge and practical understandings. The category of precarious migrants in this case refers to people with precarious legal status, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and refugee communities.

The concept of infrastructures of solidarity is central to our argument. Infrastructure here refers to parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled upon arrival. Linked to solidarity, it describes the urban activities and politics performed by different actors and institutions in the city that can generate new relationships and alliances and produce a solidarity-based diversity (Meeus et al., 2019). As stated, the infrastructure of solidarity has discursive, legal, and material components. The discursive component implies identifying the frames that challenge exclusionary narratives and problematic representations. Moreover, it involves constructing new commonalities and a common reading of the world (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). The legal component implies the municipal framework and commitments to establish, implement, and maintain a politics of welcome. Material components refer to public places, places of everyday encounter, institutional spaces, and urban spaces like ‘The Sanctuary’ in Sheffield, Trampoline House in Copenhagen, and City Plaza in Athens, which from 2016 to 2019 was a site for co-habitation for refugees and people in solidarity. Infrastructures have both formal and informal dimensions. Formal dimensions here refer to policies, legal measures, institutions, etc., whereas informal dimensions refer to forms of civil society engagement and initiatives as well as bottom-up forms of inclusion by a range of actors. We apply this understanding of infrastructures of solidarity to our two case studies in the chapter. Through this framework we answer our research question: What are the structural commonalities and differences in urban and municipal policies and practices in integrating refugees and undocumented migrants in Accra and Copenhagen? By answering the research question, we will be able to draw synergies in urban and municipal policies and practices to enhance refugees’ and vulnerable migrants’ integration in Ghana and Denmark.

5.4 Data and Case Studies

We adopted a multi-bounded case study approach that enables researchers to gain detailed information concerning the subject under consideration—in this case, the structural commonalities and differences between Accra and Copenhagen policies and practices for the reception and integration of refugees and vulnerable migrants. We used both primary and secondary data. Our primary data consisted of 14 semi-structured elite interviews with city authorities and CSOs in Copenhagen, Aalborg, and Accra. We conducted all the interviews in English (Table 5.1).

To answer our question(s), we divided the discussion section into two broad themes: firstly, structural commonalities in Accra and Copenhagen policies and practices in integrating refugees and vulnerable migrants; and secondly, structural differences in the two cities' policies and practices in integrating refugees and vulnerable migrants. We further divided the two major themes into sub-themes, as presented below.

5.5 Structural Policy Commonalities in Accra and Copenhagen

5.5.1 *Source of Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants to Cities*

An important structural commonality between Copenhagen and Accra is centred on the sources of refugee and vulnerable migrants to the cities. Literature suggested that several factors account for refugees' movements across the globe, and the

Table 5.1 Profile of the study participants

Codes	Gender	Organisation	City/Country
RR	Female	NGO/CSO	Copenhagen, Denmark
HH	Female	NGO/CSO	Copenhagen, Denmark
LL	Female	FAKTI	Copenhagen, Denmark
NN	Male	Municipal Assembly	Aalborg, Denmark
DO	Male	UNHCR-Ghana	Accra, Ghana
TT	Male	Ghana Refugee Board	Accra, Ghana
JA	Female	Municipal Assembly	Accra, Ghana
MT	Male	Ghanaian-German Centre	Accra, Ghana
JG	Female	Christian Council of Ghana	Accra, Ghana
RO	Male	Metropolitan Assembly	Accra, Ghana
AR	Female	Blue Oasis, A Community Centre for Refugees	Accra, Ghana
FK	Male	Blue Oasis, A Community Centre for Refugees	Accra, Ghana
WYK	Male	ADRA-Ghana	Accra, Ghana
JA	Male	ADRA-Ghana	Accra, Ghana

We made up all initials to ensure anonymity

journey as well as the destination are not well-defined to the persons involved (UNHCR, 2021). There is also a general understanding that the regional context shapes the characteristics of refugees and vulnerable migrants who arrive in cities, including Accra and Copenhagen. A study participant from the municipality in Denmark explained:

Where we receive refugees depends on the world, so right now you are having a lot of migrants or refugees from Ukraine, and we are expecting to get more of them in this city, 3,000 to 4,000 refugees from Ukraine in the next few months (NN 2022).

In support of the above, secondary data show that Copenhagen and other municipalities have received about 44,000 refugees from Ukraine due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The largest immigrant and refugee groups in Denmark are Turkish nationals (67,000), Syrian (45,000), Iraqi (35,000), Lebanese (28,000), Pakistani (27,000), Irani (26,000), and Afghani and Somali (both around 21,500).

Turning to Accra, Ghana, a study participant from the Ghana Refugee Board narrated:

We have refugees from over 35 different countries, and that goes beyond Africa, currently, the largest population is from Cote d'Ivoire... We have around 14,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are those who have applied but whose applications have not yet been approved (TT 2022).

Another informant from one of the municipalities in Accra stated:

We get to know most of the undocumented immigrants are coming from Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria, and because they do not have places to live, they built kiosks, which created a whole lot of nuisances, place to dump their waste, toilet issues, a whole lot of other problems (JA 2022).

Data from UNHCR-Ghana corroborated that the majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Ghana originate from Cote D'Ivoire (51.0%), Togo (26.2%), Liberia (5.5%), and Sudan (5.0%). Cameroon, Syria, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, and other countries account for 12.3% of the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in Ghana (UNHCR-Ghana, 2022). Ghana's peaceful and stable status within West Africa and its commitment to upholding the UN, AU, and ECOWAS conventions contribute to the influx of undocumented migrants from neighbouring countries, seasonal and internally displaced migrants, and urban refugees to Accra and the other 28 municipalities.

Based on these realities, the city authorities in Copenhagen and Accra, in collaboration with CSOs, are implementing innovative measures to address the issue of refugees and vulnerable migrants. Contrarily, the national authorities in both countries use national security and law as the basis for implementing restrictive and exclusionary measures toward refugees and precarious migrants.

In 2016, the City of Copenhagen ceased to be a so-called 0-quota municipality and began receiving refugees screened by the Danish Immigration Service. In the same year, the city opened a Welcome House as a reception and integration-orientated meeting place for refugees, volunteers, and the community. The centre plans different activities that focus on obstacles and opportunities for refugees,

vulnerable migrants, and volunteers in the city. As part of this civic solidarity infrastructure, former employment and integration mayor Mia Nyegaard made the following statement:

I hope and believe that Copenhagen will serve as a role model for how modern societies receive refugees in a way that is both empathic and gives refugees the best possible opportunities to become part of the city in terms of work, education, and life in the city in general. (welcomehouse.kk.dk, 2018)

Yet, the Prime Minister declared in 2019 that Denmark aims to have ‘zero asylum seekers’, a policy objective that many perceive as a strong warning to immigrants. Despite the UN and EU positions, Denmark classified Syria as a ‘safe’ region. Thus, the government informed 1200 refugees from the Damascus region that they would not have their residency renewed (Andaloussi, 2022).

In a similar fashion, the UNHCR-Ghana, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), and other relevant bodies have opened a new refugee community centre in Accra as part of activities marking World Refugee Day 2021. The centre is serving as a safe public space where refugees, implementing agencies, and volunteers meet for skill development, language learning, and recreation, among other activities (Folley, 2021). However, in June 2022, Ghana immigration authorities deported 562 Nigerians from the streets of Accra. Ghana reportedly tightened its immigration controls by deporting the precarious migrants (Nigeriabroad.com, 2022). Also, the national authorities deported 700 precarious Nigerian migrants in 2019, claiming that they had been involved in fraud, prostitution, and armed robbery, among other activities (Olufemi, 2020).

In our reading, this measure represents a hostile and exclusionary national policy toward precarious migrants. Indeed, the city authorities, together with some CSOs, are using their compositions and institutional leverage to develop innovative policies and practices based on diversity and opportunity for all, including refugees and vulnerable migrants. Yet, the political discourse and policies enacted at the national level are largely restrictive and exclusionary (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). We, therefore, argue that the national authorities, on the one hand, are developing exclusionary immigration and integration policies for refugees and vulnerable migrants while, on the other hand, city authorities and CSOs in Copenhagen and Accra are raising an infrastructure of solidarity for refugees and precarious migrants from below.

5.5.2 Local Authorities and Civil Society Collaboration

A second common feature of Copenhagen and Accra solidarity practices is the collaboration between the local authorities and civil society actors. This type of urban infrastructure is both formal and informal; it serves as left-wing policy, setting up an alternative to exclusionary asylum and refugee politics. Here we see CSO initiatives connecting with institutional policy arenas. In this context, LL, a leader from a

refugee women's group in Copenhagen, and TT, a representative of the Ghana Refugee Board (GRB) in Accra, explain:

We get funding from the Copenhagen municipality...I know not all, but many of the politicians, and we have a good relationship. They visit us occasionally. We talk about our challenges and what is going on, and that is important to me and the group (LL 2022).

Indeed, we work closely with the district and municipal assemblies where we have refugee camps. And lately, together with UNHCR, we have escalated the level of interaction with the city authorities, particularly the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) and the various Assemblies within Greater Accra (TT 2022).

Other study participants shared similar perspectives. For instance, interviewees RR and HH, who are leaders of CSOs and NGOs in Copenhagen, mentioned their informal collaboration with the Copenhagen social nurses who support drug users and undocumented migrants in the city (RR 2022; HH 2022). In addition, a study participant from the Ghanaian-German Centre for Jobs, Migration, and Reintegration (GGC) in Accra stated that the organisation has made it mandatory for their technical advisors to collaborate with municipal and regional labour officers and stakeholders within the regions (MT 2022). Study participants from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA-Ghana) in Accra explain that in the Oti and Volta regions, district assemblies provide office space, and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) teams assist in training their refugee groups in ginger farming (WYK; JA 2022). As an implementing agency, ADRA-Ghana has responsibility for urban refugees in Accra and those in the Krisan refugee camp in the Oti and Volta regions of Ghana.

In short, whether in the GN, Copenhagen, Denmark, or GS, Accra, Ghana, city authorities and CSOs are key partners in the development of infrastructures of solidarity for refugees and precarious migrants. This form of collaboration could fit perfectly with the institutional solidarity premise that local authorities and civil society actors or 'members contribute both because they are obliged to do so according to institutional arrangement and because they expect to get something back if they are in a situation of need' (Fenger & Van Pariadon, 2012, p. 51). We, therefore, argue that the formal and informal infrastructures enabling the collaborations of local authorities and CSOs towards enacting urban citizenship and solidarity are impacted by geopolitical situations such as Accra and Copenhagen. Hence, a geographical context such as Accra or Copenhagen, coupled with time and relations, shape various forms of solidarity and city belonging.

5.5.3 *Integration Policies and Practices*

National authorities in Denmark define how integration should be understood—who and how many refugees the 98 municipalities are expected to take in; afterwards the tasks of reception and integration immediately shift to the municipalities. For instance, the municipalities in Denmark oversee a three-year integration

programme for persons granted asylum. This programme includes language training, financial support, and employment-creating activities, among others (Jørgensen, 2012). The policy resort area has seen many changes over the last two-and-a-half decades, most of them in a restrictive direction. To support this assertion, a study participant in Copenhagen posited:

And I would say that the Copenhagen municipalities have a challenge with the undocumented migrants, and they do not know what to do about it, they cannot because of the law...The migration law in Denmark for the last 5–10 years has been restricted quite remarkably (RR 2022).

The implication is that solidarity city policies and practices for refugees and vulnerable migrants in Copenhagen and other municipalities is limited by the national law. In this regard, a study participant from the municipality shared:

The responsibility of the municipality towards refugees and migrants starts only with the condition that the national mandated authorities grant them the permit to stay in Denmark (NN 2022).

According to RR (2022), a staff member in one of the registered CSOs in the Copenhagen quotation above, the municipal authorities cannot support undocumented migrants because of the national law, and from NN (2022), the city authorities can only deal with refugees and persons who possess the permit to legally be in the country. These practices differ from the sanctuary city movements in the United States (e.g. Kuge & Anders, Chap. 10, volume 1), where local authorities often contest the national immigration laws. The presence and difficult plight of undocumented migrants are recognised by some of the CSOs interviewed, yet the municipal authorities have limited possibilities to help in this situation because of the national law. Since 1999, the heavy politicisation of refugee and immigrant integration has impacted national and local policymaking.

The introduction of the Integration Acts of 1999 (a tough-line integration policy requiring refugees and immigrants to be self-sufficient as native Danes), 2003 ('more people in jobs', *flere i arbejde* in Danish), and 2017 (a shift in focus from integration of refugees to repatriation), as well as the Decentralisation Act of 2007 reducing municipalities to 98 in all of Denmark, have created some policy challenges and leverage for some of the municipalities (Greve, 2012). In addition, owing to the 2004 reforms granting the municipalities the right to develop their own integration policies and practices, Copenhagen has created its own integration policies that differ in some areas from the national restrictive policies (Jørgensen, 2012). In fact, Copenhagen, like other cities, tends to have concrete experiences with handling refugees and precarious immigrants of diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, diversity remains a contentious political issue at various national scales, including Denmark (Jørgensen, 2012). Cities like Copenhagen, home to a diverse migrant population, have emerged as crucial hubs for the development and execution of both top-down and bottom-up integration policies (Kron & Lebuhn, 2020).

In the same vein, in Ghana, the state, through the Ghana Refugee Board (GRB), determines who and how many refugees are eligible to be in the country. Unlike Denmark, selected implementing agencies—namely the Adventist Development

and Relief Agency (ADRA), the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), and the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS)—shoulder the burden of integration for refugees, with major funding and technical support from UNHCR-Ghana and GRB. The activities and services provided to refugees include general security and health services, shelter provision, education, and food distribution (Ghana Refugee Board, 2019). National socio-political considerations drive city solidarity policies and practices at the local level. The municipalities lack a strong tax base because of the large informal economy, and this situation makes the MMDAs heavily dependent on national funding. In addition, the appointment rather than election of mayors and one-third of local government councillors by national governments has undermined local democracy and capacity-building (Mohammed, 2015). Therefore, the city authorities tend to answer to national authorities rather than the people living within the municipalities. Under these circumstances, national policy considerations disproportionately shape urban solidarity (Mohammed, 2015).

In summary, immigration policies are conceived at the national level, and the burden of migrants and refugee integration is felt at the local levels in Copenhagen and Accra. This situation often turns the city into a battleground (Ambrosini, 2021), where city authorities, CSOs, and precarious migrants are on one side of the battlefield and national authorities on the other. In Accra and Copenhagen, solidarity practices largely follow national laws, but with large room for interpretation.

5.5.4 Structural Differences in Urban and Municipal Policies and Practices

It can be argued that the structural differences regarding solidarity infrastructure between cities challenge the universal conception of urban sanctuary (Bauder, 2019). Indeed, cities and different geographies, such as Europe and North America, tend to present unique features or characteristics, signalling the diversity of socio-spatial strategies that actors have adopted in solidarity with refugees and precarious migrants (Agustín, 2020). Our interview material shows that there are indeed structural differences between urban and municipal policies and practices in Copenhagen and Accra.

Literature on Copenhagen reveals that the municipality has implemented four-year reception and integration policies since 2007 to guarantee equal opportunities for refugees and citizens from ethnic backgrounds other than Danish (Copenhagen Municipality, 2021). Because of decentralisation and devolution, Copenhagen and other municipalities have been able to develop their own reception and integration policies and practices, which sometimes differ in shape and character from the national policy. This situation allows for a somewhat varied degree of refugee and precarious migration policies and practices, i.e., the infrastructure of solidarity, between and among various actors—restrictive and exclusionary policies and practices at the national level and innovative and pragmatic policies from below

(Meeus et al., 2019). In addition, the practices embedded within the infrastructure of solidarities by the national and local authorities are sometimes conflictual since their encounters and experiences with refugees and precarious migrants often differ (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019).

Unlike Copenhagen, municipalities in Accra do not have specific policies on the socio-economic and cultural integration of refugees. This is a structural difference between the two cities. Two study participants from MMDAs in Accra provided evidence to support this observation.

We do not have anything specifically for refugees; those things are done at the national level. But when it comes down to the vulnerable groups, you can say yes because we have policies that translates into projects and programs for them (RO 2022).

The kind of decentralisation we practice in Ghana is not like what happens in Denmark; a whole lot of government agencies operating in the district are not under us, they are in the district alright, we do not have jurisdiction over them, they come with the expertise, but they owe allegiance to their mother ministries and companies (JA 2022).

In Accra, Ghana, there are decentralised structures in place. In fact, there are 261 MMDAs created through national legislation based on the local government Acts 426 (1993) and 936 (2016). However, the rate of devolution, or the implementation of local administrative practices without national influence, remains significantly below what is achievable (Mohammed, 2015). The largely top-down nature of national development and integration policies, coupled with a lack of political will for devolution, explains why MMDAs lack strategies for integrating refugees (Mohammed, 2015). A national mandated body—GRB—manages refugees with support from CSOs. In this context, a study participant from GRB stated:

The refugee board is the sole agency mandated to recognise persons as refugees and to provide them with all the assistance they require. The legislation that guides us is the Ghana refugee law, PNDC law 305d, and the other instruments, the UN refugee convention, and the AU convention on refugees (TT 2022).

As narrated by TT (2022), the GRB is the national body authorised by the Provisional National Defence Council law (PNDC Law 305d) to determine who qualifies to enter Ghana as a refugee. In Ghana, the state, through GRB and immigration services, determines the criteria and how many refugees and migrants are eligible to be in the country. Here, unlike Copenhagen, the responsibility for refugee reception and integration does not shift to the municipalities but to implementing agencies. In addition, the municipalities' lack of financial and material resources contributes to their low political and institutional leverage to implement policies at the local level—which sets them apart from Copenhagen. In sum, Copenhagen municipalities have integration policies for refugees, whereas the MMDAs in Accra do not have such policies. We can argue that, unlike Copenhagen, national political cleavages drive the formal and informal solidarity practices in Accra, with almost no MMDAs in the picture.

5.6 Labour Market Integration

The literature on solidarity cities has shed light on refugees' and vulnerable migrants' labour market participation and how it influences national immigration and integration policies and practices, as well as solidarity practices from below (Jørgensen & Thomsen, 2016). In Denmark, municipalities have policies for refugees' labour market integration. As part of the Copenhagen model or approaches for refugee labour market integration, municipal job consultants visit asylum centres like Sandholm, located approximately 30 km from Copenhagen City centre, to meet refugees before they arrive in Copenhagen. The objective is to determine the educational and vocational skill levels of those at the asylum centre before they arrive in the city. In our opinion, this can result in two potential outcomes: firstly, the city can prepare ahead of time for the refugees' arrival; and secondly, the assessment process may involve selective and exclusionary methods. Additionally, the city's permanent staff, along with about 150 active volunteers and CSOs, assist in the reception and labour market integration of refugees through the Welcome House. The city's labour market integration initiative involves Danish language teaching and learning and engaging in other social activities, including advice on how to quickly get internship placements with companies (welcomehouse.kk.dk, 2018).

We observe the influence of Danish welfare politics not only on national policies and practices but also on local policies related to labour market integration. These policies place a significant emphasis on encouraging everyone, regardless of age, physical status, or gender to participate in the labour market (welcomehouse.kk.dk, 2018). The municipal job and social services centres are collaborating to help refugees with mental or physical issues become more integrated into the job market (NN 2022). The city's formal or institutional practices empower refugees to actively participate in the labour market, aligning with the national welfare policy discourse, which advocates for the issuance of integration permits for refugees and migrants based on their work. Hence, the local and national levels of political cleavage in terms of refugees' labour market integration converge. In contrast, the Ghana Refugee Board (GRB) in Accra oversees refugee labour market integration with the support of established agencies. An interviewee from the GRB stated:

Again, we provide skills training for them, those who are interested so that they can take care of themselves, these are some of the things we do to make sure that the refugees are self-sufficient (TT 2022)

Drawing on the above narration, we can argue that the infrastructure of solidarity for refugees' labour market or socio-economic and cultural integration in Accra (Bauder, 2017) is handled by the national designated authority (GRB) and CSOs, especially those selected as implementing agencies. Unlike Copenhagen, municipal authorities in Accra are not responsible for formulating policies and practices toward refugees' labour market integration. In Copenhagen, municipal assemblies have policies and practices for refugees' labour market integration, whereas there are no such policies and practices in Accra municipalities.

5.7 Conclusion

This study focused on solidarity infrastructure, examining the structural commonalities and differences in urban and municipal policies and practices that facilitate the integration of refugees and vulnerable migrants in the Global North (Copenhagen, Denmark) and the Global South (Accra, Ghana). To assess structural commonalities, we considered three sub-themes: sources of refugees and vulnerable migrants in host society, local authority and civil society collaboration, and integration policies and practices. Our findings revealed, firstly, that the source of asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants to Copenhagen and Accra depends to a large degree on the geopolitical, economic, and other international contexts. The responses from our study participants led us to consider the ‘source of refugee and vulnerable migrants to cities’ as one of the commonalities. We enquired from our interviewees about the presence of refugees in their municipalities or cities, their typical origins, and the majority group, among other details. In Accra, Ghana, the newly arrived refugees were Cameroonians, a result of the separatist movement and the ensuing crisis in the Abazonian region of the country, while the majority of refugees were Ivorians. In Copenhagen, Denmark, the majority of refugees were Syrians in 2015. However, due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war that began in 2022, the majority of newly arrived refugees are Ukrainians. Indeed, there are significant differences in the types of migrants between the cities. However, it became evident that crises—conflicts/wars, fear of persecution, poverty, and internal displacement—are significant factors in the influx of refugees and vulnerable migrants to Accra and Copenhagen. While the crisis in Cameroon was the main contributing factor to newly arrived refugees in Accra, Ghana, the Russia-Ukraine war is the major contributing factor to newly arrived refugees in Copenhagen, Denmark. Secondly, in both Copenhagen and Accra, national authorities establish the framework for the introduction programme, identify refugees and migrants who qualify or not to enter the country, and then municipal authorities and CSOs develop innovative solidarity measures for their integration (Jørgensen, 2012). Thirdly, both Copenhagen and Accra highlight the critical roles of CSOs and local authorities in developing solidarity infrastructures. Indeed, a study focusing on autonomous, civic, and institutional solidarity in Denmark and other European cities has equally underscored the important roles of CSOs and municipalities in developing and consolidating solidarity infrastructure at the city level (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). Regarding Ghana, we were unable to locate any relevant literature on this topic.

However, this chapter has also brought out structural differences in urban and municipal policies and practices for the integration of refugees and vulnerable migrants in Copenhagen and Accra. We discussed two sub-themes—general policies and practices and labour market integration—and concluded that Copenhagen and other municipalities in Denmark have policies and practices for refugees’ integration. The policies and practices for refugees in Copenhagen do not significantly deviate from the national law; however, there are emerging and innovative solidarity practices that differ from the restrictive and exclusionary national integration

politics. On the other hand, Accra and the rest of the MMDAs in Ghana do not have local policies and practices for the socio-economic and political integration of refugees. Paradoxically, the Ghana Refugee Board (GRB), a national mandated body, manages city solidarity for refugees in Accra and other MMDAs, with support from UNHCR-Ghana, selected implementing agencies, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), and the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS).

In terms of direction for future study, our empirical fieldwork did not include refugees and vulnerable migrants; hence, their views on the integration policies' formulation and practices could not be assessed. Meanwhile, studies in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, and the United States (Bruce & Crettex, Chap. 8, this volume; Hansen, 2020; de Graauw & Gleeson, 2021) have stressed the role of refugees and vulnerable migrants in shaping the solidarity cities movements. In fact, a study underscored the potential representational gap that could come into play when refugees and undocumented migrants are not actively involved in solidarity campaigns that aim to improve their inclusion. In view of this gap, future comparative studies between Accra and Copenhagen should pay more attention to the inclusion of refugees and vulnerable migrants in the primary data collection process. In addition, this study has highlighted the deficiency in comparative research between cities in the Global North and Global South. We therefore propose the need for more research that offers such comparisons to better understand the two different logics, that is, the structural commonalities and differences in municipal policies and practices toward refugees and precarious migrants in the Global North and Global South.

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Part II

Between Inclusion and Exclusion

Chapter 6

Between Solidarity Cities and Local Migration Controls: Ambivalence and Fragmentation in the Field of Migrant Rights



Mouna Maaroufi  and Helge Schwiertz 

6.1 Introduction

An extensive body of international research examines local approaches to migration at the municipal level using the frame of European ‘solidarity cities’ and North American ‘sanctuary cities’ (Ridgley, 2008; Varsanyi, 2010; Bauder, 2016), which in many ways have become models for political initiatives and academic research. Recently, studies moved beyond these cases and the focus on individual cities, developing comparative analyses and broadening the context and geographical scope (see Introduction, volumes 1 and 2). In more general terms, the local level is increasingly described as crucial to the negotiation of migrant rights and the concrete situations and experiences of migrants (Ataç et al., 2023; Darling & Bauder, 2019), a development that is partly captured by the notion of a ‘local turn’ in migration and border regime studies (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018; Hinger et al., 2016, Varsanyi, 2010).

In this chapter, we review different strands of academic literature and analyse social movements’ frames on local politics of migration, noting that studies tend to (over-)emphasise either inclusive or exclusive aspects of this local turn. In contrast to anti-migrant politics at (supra-)national scales, some studies highlight the progressive potential of cities and urban actors in advocating for migrant rights, or at least implementing pragmatic policies that pursue local interests in migrants’ integration and participation. Other studies stress how (supra-) national and sub-national mechanisms of migration control intertwine and how borders are reinforced also at the local level with the city constituting another site of migration control and disenfranchisement (Ambrosini, 2021; Artero & Fontanari, 2021).

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These different foci, along with their accompanying blind spots, can perpetuate themselves when strands of literature coexist without being related to each other. We therefore propose to bridge these literatures and their foci on migration control regimes and solidarity cities more closely to obtain a nuanced picture of urban politics related to migration. Applying the notions of ambivalence and fragmentation, we argue that in the social field of migrant rights, neither a uniform description as a regime of control nor one as a solidarity city paints a coherent picture, but that both perspectives must be considered together. An analytical perspective that looks at the city in terms of control mechanisms as well as solidarities highlights the ambivalence of local politics, which both limit and open up possibilities for enacting migrant rights. In addition, we argue for a closer engagement with local migrant self-organisations emanating from community or neighbourhood organising at a particular place. These forms of political organising reflect precisely the fragmentation and ambivalence of the local level in a distinctive way, since, on the one hand, they are directly affected by relations of domination and, on the other, they have to search again and again for emancipatory scopes and escape routes.

While we elaborate these aspects based on a literature review in the first section of our contribution, we ground these considerations empirically in the second section based on a frame analysis of migrant rights initiatives in the cities of Berlin and Hamburg.¹ Based on the literature review and our empirical analysis, we argue that different forms and foci of organising co-exist that can be broadly classified into wider campaigns seeking to unite a variety of actors and groups, such as ‘solidarity city’ coalitions, self-organised migrant groups focusing on particular issues and interests, and lastly more local and place-based solidarity initiatives conceived as open for various groups suffering from racism, precarity, violence, and displacement in an urban context.

6.2 Literature on Migration and Cities: Between Control and Solidarity

6.2.1 *Ambivalence and Fragmentation*

Before reviewing the literature, we first explain our approach to the field of migrant rights, which is fundamental to our analytical emphasis on fragmentation and ambivalence. In line with approaches of reflexive and critical migration research, we start from an analysis of social contexts and practices through which migration as a social phenomenon is co-produced (Hess, 2012; Dahinden, 2016; De Genova et al., 2021; Tazzioli, 2021). According to this approach, the field of migrant rights

¹This analysis is part of a European research project with ten city-based case studies in Italy, Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, and Switzerland (Pajnik et al., 2025; Schwiertz et al., [forthcoming; https://europefrombelow.net](https://europefrombelow.net)).

is characterised by conflicts over mobility and belonging. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) describe these conflicts as ‘border struggles’ which unfold in intersectional contexts and power relations shaped by nationalism, colonialism, capitalism, racism, and sexism. We define migrant rights as related to formal laws as well as to rights claimed and taken in struggles for freedom of movement, the right-to-stay, and social justice. We focus on conflicts over migrant rights in European cities, which reflect global relations of power, exploitation, and inequality that cannot be understood without European colonial history and presence. And although we deal mainly with research on the negotiation of migrant rights at the local scale (Hinger et al., 2016; Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018; Artero & Fontanari, 2021), we also consider entanglements with European or national regimes that regulate, for example, the issuance of visas, residence rights or naturalisation.

Below, we examine the literature that analyses how the governance, control, and policing of migration are implemented and negotiated at local scales and how these scales offer distinct opportunities for migrant organising and solidarity. We thereby carve out different tendencies by contrasting the literatures on local migration regimes and solidarity cities, which can be summarised in two ideal types: a *perspective of control* and a *perspective of solidarity*. By presenting the literature heuristically according to these two ideal types, we can better recognise their pitfalls as well as their contributions to an encompassing understanding of current migration regimes that neither homogenises or idealises the urban governance of migration nor denies the possibilities of negotiation and solidarity at the local level. Furthermore, we propose relinking these perspectives by conceptualising the ambivalence and fragmentation of local migration politics.

First, combining the perspective on the persistence of migration controls at the city level with an alternative perspective on solidarity cities, we can bring the *ambivalence* of the urban field of migrant rights into focus (McNevin, 2013). This means considering both the sometimes subtle and sometimes brutally obvious mechanisms of control at the local scale, as well as the emancipatory potentials of organising locally as opposed to the national scale. Second, we highlight the *fragmentation* of the urban space in terms of negotiating migrant rights and solidarity (Blokland et al., 2015). This allows us to go beyond a rather homogenising view of solidarity cities and consider the different situatedness of issues and struggles; it also allows us to see the city not just as another regime of control but to consider the distinct starting points and potentials that emerge from these local political spaces.

6.2.2 Local Migration Regimes

In a first step, we discuss studies that predominantly describe the control mechanisms of local migration regimes. Maurizio Artero and Elena Fontanari study ‘local politics of exclusion’ and how these politics are implemented through administrative barriers, opaque rules, and informal obstructions (Artero & Fontanari, 2021, p. 1). They observe that administrative regulations and contingencies have

multiplied in local regimes and seek to deter, identify, sort, and criminalise migrants (Artero & Fontanari, 2021, pp. 9–10). A multitude of actors imposes and negotiates these regulations, which are therefore not always coherent or linear. In their ubiquity, local bordering processes contribute to spreading conditions of insecurity and precarity for migrants, as well as extending responsibility for border policing to various local actors (Bauder & Darling, 2019, p. 6). Other studies on the ‘re-scaling of border control’ (Darling, 2017, p. 183) show how borders are reproduced in everyday activities and move with migrants into the social spaces where they live (Anderson et al., 2012). These borders ‘follow people and surround them as they try to access paid labour, welfare benefits, health, labour protections, education, civil associations, and justice’ (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 6). Thus, urban social policies can be considered an indirect tool for migration control through restrictive social rights, especially for irregular migrants. Though some cities implement and impose migration policies that are more rights-based and inclusive than national policies, there are also ‘local powers committed to combating irregular immigration with greater determination than federal powers’ (Ambrosini, 2021, p. 188; Varsanyi, 2010). The ambivalence of the urban and local scales that render urban governance a ‘battleground’ is thus addressed in this literature, but it deserves further interrogation as to their pitfalls and possibilities in relation to migrant rights (Ambrosini, 2021, p. 188; Varsanyi, 2010). Here, we draw on studies that conceptualise inclusion and exclusion through ‘differential inclusion’ (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), as well as those that highlight the ambivalence and fragmentation of political struggles in the field of migrant rights (McNevin, 2013; Blokland et al., 2015). Furthermore, recent literature on municipal bureaucracies underlines how local authorities, service providers, and street-level bureaucrats act as gatekeepers, as their actions determine whether people without legal status are granted or denied access to social rights and services (Eule et al., 2019).

6.2.3 *Solidarity Cities*

In contrast to analyses of local migration regimes, studies on sanctuary and solidarity cities as well as urban citizenship highlight the inclusive potentials of urban approaches (Nyers, 2010; Bauder, 2016; Bauder & Darling, 2019; Jeffries & Ridgley, 2020). Harald Bauder and Jonathan Darling (2019, p. 9) stress how sanctuary or solidarity cities constitute ‘an important political critique of the nation-state from within’ as they act within nation-states but as an ‘oppositional practice to nation-state authority’. In that sense, Bauder (2016) has associated the sanctuary city movement with a powerful intervention that renders possible a concrete imagination of a world without borders. He perceives sanctuary and solidarity as a ‘counter model to Westphalian state sovereignty in dealing with human mobility’ (Bauder, 2022, p. 87). While there are differences between sanctuary cities, they all constitute ‘urban struggles over rights and belonging’ (Bauder & Darling, 2019, p. 11). Closely related to the concepts of urban sanctuary and solidarity are debates on urban

citizenship that focus on ways in which urban inhabitants have, claim, and enact rights regardless of their national migration status (Braun et al., 2019; Holm & Lebuhn, 2020).

Another important debate around solidarity cities deals with municipal initiatives or ‘municipal activism’ (Spencer & Delvino, 2019). Studies show how municipal actors refrain from implementing supranational and national laws and regulations ‘one-to-one’ at the local level, creating site-specific legal requirements or refusing to fully translate national requirements into official actions, e.g. ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ (DADT) policies (Schilliger, 2019). DADT policies allow people without regular residency permits to face local administrations with less risk and offer them more security in everyday city life. Other studies argue that cities use their so-called integration policies to respond to the needs of people with precarious residence statuses (Spencer & Delvino, 2019; Ataç et al., 2020). They set up parallel structures or they treat migrants with precarious status as equal co-inhabitants of the city and provide access to local welfare and healthcare services. In various North American cities, anyone who can prove their identity and residence in the city is entitled to an official municipal identity card, recognised by the municipal authorities—including the police—and some private institutions such as banks (de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016). European examples of ‘municipal activism on irregular migration’ (Spencer & Delvino, 2019) include initiatives to enable victims and witnesses to ‘safely report’ crimes; to provide access to healthcare, schooling, shelter, legal advice, protection from domestic violence and exploitation by employers; and to strengthen groups and civil society organisations that support migrants.

A study by Fiona Jeffries and Jennifer Ridgley (2020, pp. 553–554) adds an abolitionist and more sceptical perspective to the debate on sanctuary cities in Canada by reflecting the shortcomings of sanctuary policies, especially with regard to the reproduction of differential and exclusionary notions of ‘good’ and ‘deserving’ migrants. In this spirit, they advocate for a ‘non-reformist reforms’ approach and transformative practices of solidarity that are able to achieve short-term improvements, paving the way for deeper systemic change. They state that ‘long-term social change is contingent on often invisible and labour-intensive relationship-building work and building connections across a range of struggles and communities’ (Jeffries & Ridgley, 2020, p. 561). This kind of work is carried out largely by migrant rights initiatives and movements ‘from below,’ as discussed in the following sections.

6.2.4 Urban Migrant Rights Movements

Studies on migrant struggles as social and urban movements form another strand of literature that is significant for linking issues of migration, solidarity, and the city with a focus on their conflictual dimensions. While the above discussion emphasised migration control and solidarity as distinct tendencies in urban migration governance, the literature on migrant struggles relates disenfranchisement and control

mechanisms to processes of negotiation. Migrant struggles offer a privileged epistemic point of view on the pitfalls and potentials of local migration politics, not only for activist and political strategies but also for social science analyses since these struggles are directly affected by relations of domination and the need to constantly navigate and negotiate these relations (Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018; Schwiertz, 2021).

Migrant struggles can be approached through a lens of conjunctures of solidarity and anti-racism (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). Our empirical research, which focuses on European and particularly the German cities Berlin and Hamburg, includes migrant struggles that for the most part began in the early 2010s or have been taken up during the ‘summer of migration’ in 2015. Much of the related academic work analyses these conjunctures and addresses refugee protest movements in various cities across Europe, including at Oranienplatz in Berlin and by the group ‘Lampedusa in Hamburg’ (Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018), as well as the tensions of refugee self-organisations and support structures (Ataç & Steinhilper, 2020, p. 1). A second, still-growing body of literature deals with a so-called welcome culture emerging as a reaction to the 2015 summer of migration and the associated practices in ambivalent relationships between humanitarian aid and solidarity (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; della Porta, 2018; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2020). Such refugee support initiatives, in particular those with a predominantly humanitarian mission, were also criticised for replacing state functions, incorporating patronising and racialising discourses, and aligning with neoliberal interests (Picozza, 2021; Karakayali, 2018). Nevertheless, volunteering for refugees and the related struggles of migration have de facto countered hegemonic anti-migrant discourses and right-wing mobilisations (Karakayali, 2018, p. 327; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2020, p. 107). More recent mobilisations such as the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020—including their references to abolitionist demands like a defunding of the police and around the racialised and unequal reception of refugees from Ukraine since 2022—have impacted the initiatives that we study as well but have not received much attention in the literature yet. The initiatives that emerged from these contexts, as well as from the conflictual relations in support structures, seem to prioritise self-organising within Black or migrant communities, focusing on emancipation and empowerment of communities, as we will explore in the section on self-organised groups below (Barry, 2021).

In contrast, other local initiatives seek and search commonalities or, in Angela Davis’s words, an ‘intersectionality of struggles’, focusing on the general precarisation of working and living conditions, especially in large cities (Mezzadra, 2021). We elaborate on such attempts in the sections on coalitions and campaigns as well as place-based initiatives. As a prominent example for the latter, the well-studied squat City Plaza in Athens shows that lived and place-based experiences of solidarity go beyond humanitarianism and enable new forms of collective power. Similarly, the autonomy of migration approach describes that migrants rely on collective networks to organise their migration and arrival based on the exchange of knowledge and mutual support. In arrival cities, these relations are perpetuated and can in the best case come together with other social and political structures and struggles in

neighbourhoods. Based on the example of Kotti & Co in Berlin, Ulrike Hamann and Ceren Türkmen (2020, p. 3) argue that class oppression, racism, and the neoliberal restructuring of cities interlock in particular and novel ways, forging ‘communities of struggle’, which they describe as a ‘collective sense of organizing as it emerges in highly diverse but long-term sustainable place-based political groups.’ Focusing on shared needs and demands—organising of tenants, for example—can help to recognise the role of migration regimes in reproducing urban inequality and racism, contributing to the emergence of new collective subjectivities based on common political struggles. As the interest in renter and neighbourhood alliances and the resulting place-bound ‘communities of struggle’ shows, the literature on migrant struggles increasingly incorporates the role of housing and relations of care, examining how these fields can provide common terrains for forging alliances and solidarity (Hamann & Türkmen, 2020; Schilliger, 2020).

6.3 The Framings of Political Initiatives in the Field of Migrant Rights

6.3.1 *Methods of Frame Analysis*

So far, our literature review has highlighted aspects of ambivalence and fragmentation while bridging critical migration, border regime, urban citizenship, and solidarity studies. Now we ask: How is the ambivalent relation between migration, solidarity, and the city considered by migrant rights initiatives? To answer this question we explore which frames are employed by local political initiatives and how these initiatives co-constitute the social field of migrant rights through discursive practices. We employ frame analysis to discursively approach underlying norms, beliefs, perceptions, and emotions embedded in texts (Benford & Snow, 2000). Our analysis examines not only how texts are organised but their ‘communicative power’ as well. In this way, frame analysis considers what information is repressed and displayed, and how the content is selected and classified (Entman, 1993, pp. 51–54). While framing is to a large extent unconscious or unintentional, articulating and reproducing dominant discourses, we examine in particular the ‘strategic framing’ of local initiatives: i.e., the ‘conscious and intentional selection of language and concepts to influence political debate and decision-making’ (Bacchi, 2009).

The first step for conducting the frame analysis consisted of mapping relevant initiatives in Berlin and Hamburg in the spring of 2022. Based on this mapping we conducted a case selection favouring initiatives that relate to an urban, local, or translocal context, were active in recent years, and addressed social issues other than migration such as access to housing or (health)care. We then selected appropriate texts from these initiatives, such as self-representations or public calls, based on their recency, length, and content. The subsequent analysis, conducted between April 2022 and January 2023, sought firstly to identify the two basic markers of a

frame which are called *diagnosis* (of problems) and *prognosis* (of solutions). We broke down each of these markers into submarkers to identify the frame: for example, concerning the diagnosis, we asked who or what causes the problem to appear or reoccur. Proceeding in this way, for each diagnosis and prognosis we identified the active actor, passive actor, affect, and normativity. In addition, we coded categories referring to the local and urban scale, translocal connections, and intersectional linkages.

6.3.2 *Typology of Initiatives and Their Scale and Field References*

In line with our theoretical considerations, our empirical study reflects the heterogeneity of political initiatives in the field of migrant rights. Accordingly, the frames that we identified range from broader societal issues, such as global inequalities shaped by colonialism and capitalism and transforming migration regimes towards more place- and group-specific issues such as the difficulties faced by women in refugee camps. The initiatives in the field of migrant rights advocate for equal access to rights and services and address different problems, such as the forced accommodation in camps, but also criticise the illegalisation, invisibility, and repression of migrants and their struggles in more general terms.

In both cities, three types of initiatives can be distinguished, each thematising and linking migrant rights in different ways: coalitions and campaigns, self-organised groups, and place-based initiatives. Their internal organisation is crucial in differentiating them. Coalitions and campaigns try to unite different groups around broad and shared frames and claims. Self-organised groups are primarily made up of individuals personally affected by the struggles they engage in, aiming to create an empowering context where power imbalances are minimised, forming a strong foundation for long-term activism and alliances between groups and persons with different positionalities. Place-based initiatives cannot be clearly assigned only to the field of migrant rights as they try to establish a connection to the neighbourhood through various topics and treat migration as a cross-cutting issue. In the practices of these initiatives, we observed different forms of autonomous, civic, or institutional solidarity (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019), as well as more inclusive or exclusive solidarities (Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2020).

6.3.3 *Coalitions and Campaigns*

The larger coalitions and campaigns that we observed are composed of different groups and individuals that reunite in more or less loose networks for particular purposes and phases of mobilisation. In the German context, many such coalitions

and campaigns emerged in the aftermath of the ‘summer of migration’ in 2015 and many of them are less or no longer active. In their focus on the rights, representation, and participation of migrants, they seek to develop broader visions and notions of solidarity and to voice them publicly through tangible claims and campaigns. They demand better access to rights and services as well as more democratic participation and have an inclusive approach such as the network *We’ll Come United* (WCU): ‘There is no justification for unequal rights...Whether it’s about the right to housing, education, work, mobility or the right to health care. Social and political rights exist for all those who are here.’² WCU links the struggle against divisive migration regimes to a broader call for solidarity: ‘The law differentiates between different countries of origin and classifies us accordingly: those with a good and those with a bad perspective of staying...We demand the extension of solidarity which doesn’t make any divide based on one’s origin.’

The different coalitions also have their respective focal points and spatial references. Whereas the WCU network stresses the translocal relations and seeks to connect different local and self-organised groups across Germany, the Solidarity City campaigns in Berlin and Hamburg have a clear urban focus, referring to the city level and municipal policies and institutions. In the self-description of Solidarity City Hamburg Alliance (*Bündnis Solidarity Stadt Hamburg*), the connection between migration, city, and solidarity is framed in general terms. The city is referred to in two ways: as a municipal government and as an association of citizens ‘from below’. On the one hand, the city is addressed as a municipal government that can be called upon to live up to the designation as a solidarity city by granting refugees admission and extending rights. On the other, the city appears as a potential entity of an all-inclusive solidarity city configured through a participatory process involving the whole society. Regarding the latter, the coalition not only draws a positive image of the solidarity city as a whole, but the city is imagined as a collective subject: ‘A Solidarity City changes the perspective: it no longer asks how certain groups of people can be integrated into society, but how we can together make our city more inclusive...We conceive of a Solidarity City as an actor that negotiates and concretely implements global issues of living together in solidarity at the local level.’

Not surprisingly, the network Solidarity City Berlin also refers strategically to the city level ‘where we have the best chance to directly intervene and develop pressure.’ In their self-description, they trace a genealogy of struggles—from the Arab Spring to the refugee protest movements and the summer of migration in 2015—to conclude that the desired change has not been achieved, which is why the network has chosen the city level as a strategically promising starting point. The text brings together the two framings of the city. It suggests that access to equal rights can be provided primarily at the scale of the city of Berlin, which involves the city government as well as associations of city residents. Focusing on the latter is framed as a more promising strategy: ‘We didn’t wait for the government, deciding instead to

² German quotes have been translated by the authors.

act together, now.’ In this case, the city is described as an assemblage of ‘everyday Berliners’, diverse in composition yet capable of acting collectively and inspiring hope for a different future based on solidarity. A more particular campaign has also emerged out of the Solidarity City network in Berlin. In focusing on the situation of undocumented migrants, the campaign Legalization Now demands that the ‘precariousness and invisibility’ of precaritised migrants is ended through their legalisation. However, they also elaborate on a broader context that causes and enables illegalisation due to the ‘inequality between the Global South and the Global North as a historical reality’, which continues today.

To sum up, the examined campaigns and coalitions seek to overcome internal differences and focus instead on common opponents and issues. They aim to unite various groups of activists, supporters, self-organised migrants, and other actors to struggle together, formulate demands, and enact rights toward the municipality and government.

6.3.4 *Self-Organised Groups*

Self-organised migrant and refugee groups link the situation of migrants and refugees with the need for political self-organisation and empowerment (Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018, p. 186). In contrast to the solidarity city campaigns, they do not start with an abstract vision, but with very concrete grievances related to their everyday experiences. This personal experience of problems is collectivised and politicised in their group processes. With this approach, self-organised groups problematise the individualisation of migrants’ problems and invisibilisation of their struggles. As the Hamburg-based group WomeN IN Action (NINA) states: ‘The personal problems of individuals are our problems—we see them as problems of society that we face.’

The practice of self-organising as a group of affected people on their own terms is presented as a goal in itself: a much-needed process of emancipation and empowerment that aims to break migrants’ societal isolation and subordination and to make their stories and voices heard. In the self-organisations International Women* Space (IWS) and NINA, intersectional inequalities are considered very concretely with regard to the situation of refugee women. IWS was initiated during the occupation of Oranienplatz in Berlin from 2012 to 2014—dominated by male refugees and supporters—as a way to strengthen the voice and influence of refugee women in the struggle and to render visible the particular situation of refugee women and the intersectional forms of oppression they face (Ünsal, 2015; Barry, 2021). They have a sub-group of refugee women called ‘Break isolation’ to address differences and inequalities within their structure and internal relations (Ünsal, 2015). These differences can be a source of strength, as IWS states, ‘we organize politically to defend ourselves against the issues and attacks that we as women are facing: as refugee women, as migrant women and as non-migrant women...Our learning and our

self-education is part of our emancipatory struggle. In our group, we stand in solidarity with each other and we support each other on an everyday basis.'

Lampedusa in Hamburg and the Black Community Coalition for Justice and Self-Defence are other examples for self-organised groups. Both groups are active in Hamburg since the early 2010s and unite Black communities and refugees. The Black Community Coalition focuses more clearly on the situation and struggles of various African and Black Communities in Hamburg, most recently by providing specific support to Africans fleeing from the war in Ukraine and organising bus transfers to Hamburg in collaboration with other groups in #EvacuateAfricansFromUA-Activities. ARRIVATi, a sub-group of the Black Community Coalition that focuses on psychosocial support and healthcare, was providing shelter and accommodation for people arriving in Hamburg. They emphasise the different treatment of migrants when it comes to access to rights and benefits such as housing, care work, and psychological support. By framing the unequal treatment of BiPocs from Ukraine as exemplary for the uneven and racialising treatment that migrants and refugees face in general, they and other initiatives address differential inclusion as one of the core elements of the EU's current migration regime. Centring anti-Black racism and the situation of African refugees is one way to respond to the divisive asylum and migration regime that differentiates based on national origin and is fundamentally shaped by a colonial heritage of racism and current conjunctures of racial capitalism.

In contrast to the more universal idea of a solidarity city, self-organisations start with particular problems that are contextualised within sexist and racist structures in migration regimes. A crucial political mechanism is to render these problems visible as social problems: to form a community of struggle and solidarity out of the isolation of individuals. Central to this is the self-empowerment and mutual support of affected persons within their groups. Furthermore, self-organised groups also engage in acts of transversal solidarity beyond their own group. In this vein, IWS reaches out to other marginalised parts of society such as the homeless, provides community support, and cooperates with other groups. They are part of the Alliance of International Feminist*s Berlin and as such co-organise the 8th of March demonstration and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25, which in 2023 was dedicated to the situation in Gaza. Here, vantage points emerge for linking struggles regarding broader political projects such as a solidarity city. Thus, in conjunction with their internal organising, these self-organisations also publicly voice political demands and occasionally address these to municipal actors. For example, NINA organised a protest in front of Hamburg's Senate for Urban Development and Housing and handed out a letter directed to the Senator demanding access to housing for all instead of forced accommodation and isolation in camps.

The city appears here not as an ideal-political point of reference, but first and foremost as a local regime of forced detention, deportation, and denial of social rights. Through activities such as visiting camps and cooking for the homeless, the groups act at a local and urban scale, re-claiming the city to some extent. By providing mutual aid and fostering an empowering, equal setting among themselves, they prefigure and practice the forms of community, co-living, and care they advocate

for. Through these political actions, they generate an urban political space that, although it cannot be subsumed under uniform ideas of a solidarity city, can be understood as a piece in the mosaic of an aspired construction of solidarity cities. Such an approach could not be based on the city or society as a whole; it starts first and foremost with more empowering and equal relations in one's own community and neighbourhood.

6.3.5 *Place-Based Initiatives*

Local place-based initiatives focus on everyday encounters more than on public outputs. They overlap with self-organisations to a certain extent as the example of Lampedusa in Hamburg shows. The group has been quite visible as a place-based initiative, first based in Hamburg's popular St. Pauli district and later in the city centre with a protest tent they call 'the symbol of our struggle'. Lampedusa in Hamburg has not been able to secure a continuous space for their activism after the eviction of the tent and repression by the police, which was justified under the pretext of the pandemic. In Berlin-Kreuzberg, where groups also formed in a physical place when they occupied Oranienplatz, police surveillance and violence have also long been central topics. The opposition against a recently constructed police station at the famous Berlin-Kreuzberg square Kottbusser Tor has led to the formation of a new local protest initiative called *Kotti für alle* (Kotti for all). In their self-description, they show that their solidarity encompasses all people around Kotti and particularly the most marginalised and precaritised: 'We want a society of solidarity in which all people can live peacefully without fear of skyrocketing rents, homelessness, job loss, hunger and racist (police) violence.'

Another local initiative that was part of our analysis is Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch (WISO), which builds relations of support in a working-class neighbourhood of Hamburg by having weekly gatherings in the format of a common office day and bi-weekly collective co-counselling. In doing so, WISO seeks to 'build a network of solidarity in which we can participate all our lives—no matter which language we speak, how many children we have, and how much we work.' Moreover, they organise neighbourhood assemblies and local protests, for example, in the case of eviction threats. WISO does not focus on migrant rights, but rather on common issues such as unemployment benefits, housing, and work. Legal issues around migration regularly form part of their collective counselling practice too. WISO also cooperates with other local initiatives and refugee self-organisations such as NINA. In their attempt to create relations of solidarity in the neighbourhood, they practice a form of solidarity city from below, which is based on local community networks rather than on the city as a whole.

Locally-based solidarity initiatives operate at the neighbourhood scale to highlight prevailing social issues and problematise the negative effects of urban policies and actors such as the police, especially when they affect precarious migrants. They oppose tendencies toward securitisation and criminalisation that lead to repression

and displacement of migrants, activists, homeless people, or drug consumers in urban spaces. In addition, they call for improving local infrastructures and support structures, such as social work, and seek to establish autonomous infrastructures and spaces for encounter, community organising, and collective support for themselves. These place-based initiatives address migration as an intersectional, cross-cutting issue related to a general trend toward precarisation through homelessness, work bans, deficits, and exclusions in healthcare and social work, lack of social infrastructure, and police violence. The focus is less on the city as a whole and more on developing a positive political vision in relation to one's local community through neighbourhood solidarity.

6.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have been guided by the question of how solidarity city approaches can be situated within the power relations and struggles of a field of migrant rights increasingly characterised by fragmentation and ambivalence. This question is also of political relevance in view of the discussion regarding to what extent solidarity city approaches can be revived 'from below' and which other urban and local references, beyond a rather abstract city scale, are significant for (pro)migrant organising. Departing from a conventional approach to solidarity cities that has gained prominence in the last decade, our chapter analysed diverse urban migrant rights initiatives in Berlin and Hamburg—coalitions and campaigns, self-organisations, and place-based initiatives—which enact various visions of a solidarity city 'from below'.

The empirical analyses of how these initiatives frame issues showed that the broad approach to solidarity cities is complemented by initiatives that establish local and place-based forms of solidarity from within communities and neighbourhoods. The results of the frame analysis correspond in part to our argument regarding the literature review. The framings illustrate that the initiatives operate in an extremely ambivalent and fragmented social field, which is difficult to reconcile with the idealistic and universalistic at times visions of a solidarity city. Yet, the frames cling to positive notions of their urban community and neighbourhood so that a one-sided view of the city as a mere regime of control does not do justice to the radical imaginaries and prefigurative politics enacted by local initiatives. Their continuous practice allows them to build up sustainable capacities for (self-)organising even in political contexts and conjunctures where broad mobilisations around migrant rights are lacking.

For the most part, the initiatives we have examined share an approach that highlights the structural causes for migrants' precarious situation characterised by illegalisation and criminalisation as well as unequal access to rights and services. They problematise the individualisation of these societal issues by socialising them and offer alternative approaches that bring together communities in collective and intersectional struggles. In response to the increasingly fragmented conditions and the

ambivalent and divisive politics that materialise on urban scales, we showed that many initiatives focus on specific communities, such as refugee women or Black/African refugees, or on certain neighbourhoods. Rather than trying to imagine the entire city, with its politics, peoples, and infrastructures as one based on solidarity—in contrast to broader campaigns that seek to unite a variety of positions in ‘solidarity city’ coalitions—these initiatives seek to create concrete relationships of support and solidarity from below in a particular place. Beyond a universal narrative of the solidarity city, which can only function as a political horizon but seems particularly distant in the current political conjuncture, it is therefore important to consider the particular and local struggles that actually give life to this narrative, while continuing to create a unifying narrative based on these struggles within solidarity communities and neighbourhoods.

The ambivalence and fragmentation in the field of migrant rights, caused by divisive migration regimes and mirrored in the literature discussed above—which oscillates between a focus on solidarity cities and local migration controls—are therefore articulated in different types of initiatives that focus on specific situatedness, strategies, and spatial references that, at best, have a complementary effect. Unpacking a rather broad notion of solidarity cities, we showed how these migrant rights initiatives situate their struggles at city, community, and neighbourhood scales. They contribute to a grounded concept of solidarity cities ‘from below’, navigating the tensions between particularism and universalism, as well as between a critique of migration controls and a radical imagination of a different society.

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Chapter 7

Contested Solidarity: Exploring Local Variation in Migration-Related Protest in Germany



Elias Steinhilper and Moritz Sommer

7.1 Introduction

In recent years, conflicts over the issue of migration have amounted to a new structuring divide in European societies (Kriesi et al., 2012). During the refugee reception crisis in Europe that began to unfold in 2015, the politicisation of migration has become visible in public debates (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022; Rea et al., 2019), along with a rise in migration-related and far-right protest mobilisations in many European countries (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2021). Germany, too, witnessed polarised reactions with both strong mobilisations of pro-migrant civil society (Hamann & Karakayali, 2017; Stjepandić et al., 2023) and an increase in anti-migrant protest and violence (Jäckle & König, 2016; Rucht, 2018).¹

In this chapter, we unpack these ambivalent dynamics of solidarity and ‘anti-solidarity’ (Bauder, 2022; p. 106) with refugees and migrants at the local level (see also Maaroufi & Schwiertz, Chap. 7, this volume). We analyse migration-related protest as one indicator of (anti)solidarity. While various scholars have pointed at the multifarious definitions and hybrid practices of migrant solidarity, ranging from direct action to contentious politics (Bauder & Juffs, 2020; della Porta & Steinhilper, 2022), protests constitute a practice in which (competing) visions of migrant and refugee reception or ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ solidarity (Schwenken & Schwiertz, 2020, p. 406) are enacted and publicly performed.

We study migration-related protest dynamics in two medium-sized towns in eastern Germany covering the period from 2014 to 2018. This allows assessing the

¹ This chapter is a revised, updated and translated version of Steinhilper and Sommer (2022).

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extent to which the ‘long summer of migration’ in 2015 has affected the dynamics of contentious solidarity with refugees and migrants in these two towns.

The chapter thereby complements three strands of literature: firstly, the scholarship on ‘solidarity cities’, which mostly focuses on urban centres (Bauder, 2022; Bauder & Darling, 2019); secondly, comparative protest research, which mostly concentrates on national trends (Kriesi et al., 2012; Kriesi et al., 1992; Kriesi et al., 2019) or on major protest events such as the G20 summits or mass mobilisations such as the ‘Fridays for Future’ protests in Europe (Haunss et al., 2017; Sommer & Haunss, 2020); and thirdly, research on political conflict documenting trends of increasing politicisation and polarisation in civil society related to the issue of migration (Grande, 2018) yet has rarely investigated cross-local variation.

We proceed as follows: first, we outline our analytical approach. Second, we present descriptive evidence on the patterns of migration-related protest in the two towns over time. Third, we explore why Neuruppin in the state of Brandenburg has evolved as a predominantly welcoming local setting with high levels of pro-migrant protest, while in Plauen in the state of Saxony, anti-migrant actors have been dominant in the streets.

7.2 Analytical Approach and Methods

The void in comparative research on local protest is related to a lack of data. In many German municipalities and districts, public authorities do not provide access to their collection of protest event data at all. And if they do, the available data vary across regions. Furthermore, administrative data on protest usually cover only protest types that require prior registration such as rallies and demonstration marches protected by the Assembly Act. To address the shortcoming of administrative protest data, at the national level standardised data on protests in Germany have been collected applying ‘protest event analysis’ (Hutter, 2014)—a variant of content analysis in which events are coded based mostly on national daily newspapers. Such analyses provide important insights into the development of protest dynamics at the national level. However, this data does not allow for reliable analyses at the local level since national newspapers rarely and only selectively report on smaller protests beyond the urban centres (Hocke, 1996).

For our analysis, we thus resort to local daily newspapers, which are more likely to cover smaller protest events of local significance. We selected the main local newspaper for each city, Ruppiner Anzeiger in Neuruppin and Plauener Zeitung in Plauen. Following Rucht (2001), we applied a broad definition of protest that includes a wide range of protest forms (from rallies and petitions to flash mobs, politically motivated damage to property, strikes, etc.). We combined automated and manual data collection methods: in an automated pre-selection, a search string covering a wide range of protest forms was used to identify potentially relevant articles. The pre-selection was manually checked, and relevant protest articles were subsequently coded by human coders.² To complement this quantitative perspective on

² We checked the quality of coding by regular hidden and unannounced intercoder reliability tests yielding a satisfactory agreement for coded variables of 92.3%.

protest dynamics and assess the role of local context factors, we conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with key informants from civil society and local politics in both towns.³

The analysis is based on the logic of a structured case comparison of two medium-sized towns in eastern Germany. The data allows to identify protest patterns over time and across space, considering varying local contexts. The two towns have similar social structures but differ regarding their (party-)political context. Plauen is the largest town in the Vogtlandkreis (county) in Saxony, with 65,000 inhabitants. The town is characterised by a low number of immigrants; only 3.3% of the population in 2014 consisted of foreigners, which is typical for medium-sized towns in east Germany. It struggled with economic difficulties and an unemployment rate of 13.2% in 2014 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021). With respect to political parties, the town has had a centre-right majority in local, county, and federal-state politics for many years. The right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) received 20% of votes in the last municipal election in 2019 (Stadt Plauen, 2019).

With almost 32,000 inhabitants, Neuruppin in Brandenburg is the largest town in the county of Ostprignitz-Ruppin. Like Plauen, Neuruppin has a low number of inhabitants without German passport, only 2.6% in 2014. The town's unemployment rate was 11.7% in 2014. Unlike Plauen, Neuruppin's political landscape can be characterised as a centre-left majority at local, county, and federal state levels. During the municipal election of 2019, the AfD only received 10.9% of votes (Stadt Neuruppin, 2019), which is comparatively low for Brandenburg standards.

7.3 Patterns of Migration-Related Protest in Neuruppin and Plauen

In this section, we first present data on the dynamics of migration-related protest in both towns between 2014 and 2018. We subsequently explain differences, drawing from the qualitative interviews and additional contextual information. The data show that solidarity with migrants has been highly contested at the local level.

We start our exploration of protest dynamics in the two towns by inspecting the distribution of protest events over time. Corresponding to research that has observed a politicisation of society as a result of the refugee reception crisis (Grande, 2018), we expect an increase in the overall protest activity around 2015 reflecting in the number of protest events and protest participants. In line with this expectation, Fig. 7.1 shows that protest activity in both cities peaks in 2015 and 2016. However,

³In Plauen, eight interviews were conducted: three with local politicians with different party affiliations, five with representatives of different civil society organisations covering both informal groups and larger associations. Similarly, the ten interviews conducted in Neuruppin: four with local politicians and six with representatives of civil society organisations. In both towns, far-right actors did not respond to interview requests.

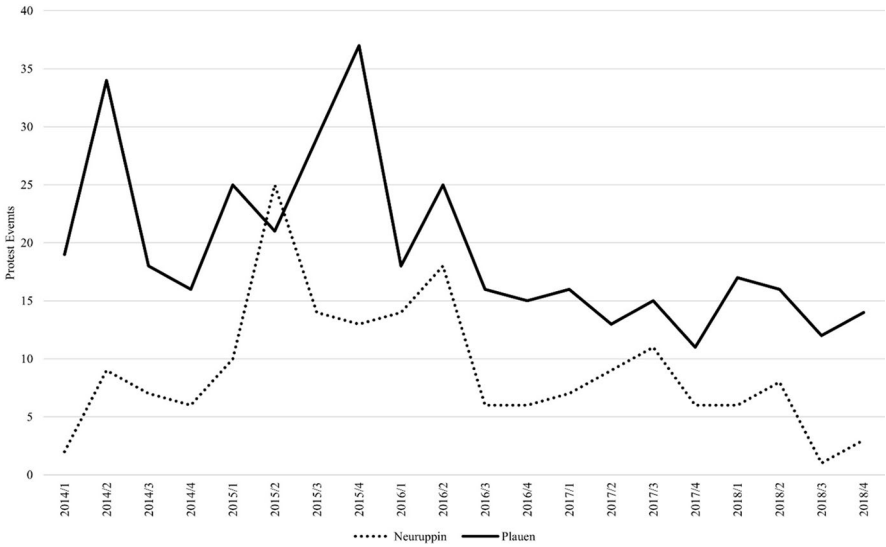


Fig. 7.1 Number of protest events per quarter, Plauen and Neuruppin

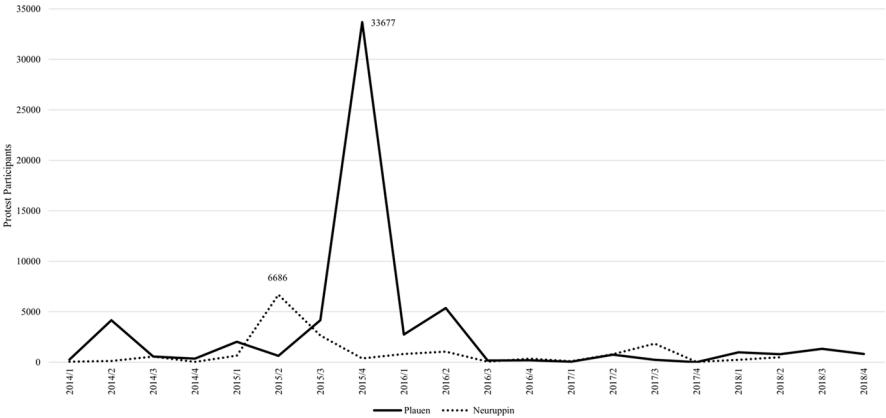


Fig. 7.2 Protest participants per quarter, Plauen and Neuruppin. Note: To avoid distortions, signature lists and petitions were not taken into account for the evaluation of the number of participants

the number of protest events starts to decline in the second half of 2016. Note that given the differences in the size of the two towns, we inspect the distribution of protests over time rather than comparing the absolute numbers across localities. This pattern is even more accentuated in terms of the number of participants in protest events shown in Fig. 7.2.

In 2015, protest mobilisation peaks in both towns. These numbers are unmatched in the years that follow. Against the assumption of a consistent long-term effect, the

increasing politicisation within civil society around 2015 did not lead to a long-lasting increase of protest activity. Furthermore, while the mobilisation peaks in both towns are migration-related, they differ fundamentally in their quality. In Plauen, the high number of participants during this peak period is primarily due to the mobilisation of the nationalist and anti-migrant protest movement ‘Wir sind Deutschland’ (We are Germany). The increase in Neuruppin is mainly driven by pro-migrant counterprotests against a neo-Nazi demonstration titled ‘Tag der deutschen Zukunft’ (Day of the German Future) on June 6, 2015.

To gain further insights, we inspect the prominence of migration-related topics over time. We expect a boost in the relevance of migration-related topics compared to other topics in local protest activity from the refugee reception crisis onward. Figure 7.3a (Plauen) and Fig. 7.3b (Neuruppin) confirm a significant increase and a temporary dominance of migration-related protests in 2015 and 2016. However, migration-related protests decrease proportionately in both towns at the end of 2016, reaching levels comparable to those before the ‘long summer of migration’.

Despite these similarities, the comparison also sheds light on local differences. In Plauen, a rise in migration-related protests takes place in the second half of 2015, at the time of the increased refugee reception and is mainly driven by a series of anti-migrant protests. In Neuruppin, migration-related issues had already comprised a considerable part of local protests before 2015, at least in relative numbers, which

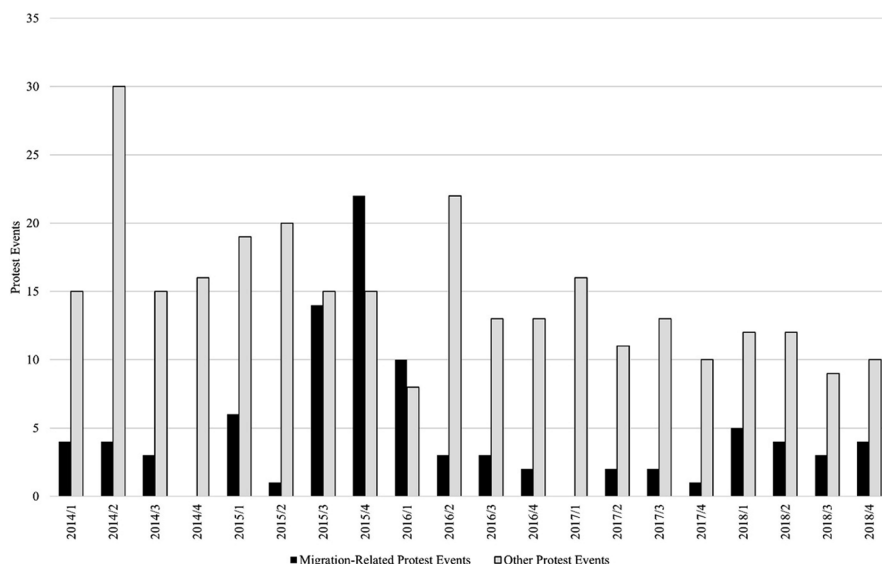


Fig. 7.3 (a) Migration-related protest events per quarter, Plauen (top). (b) Migration-related protest events per quarter, Neuruppin (bottom)

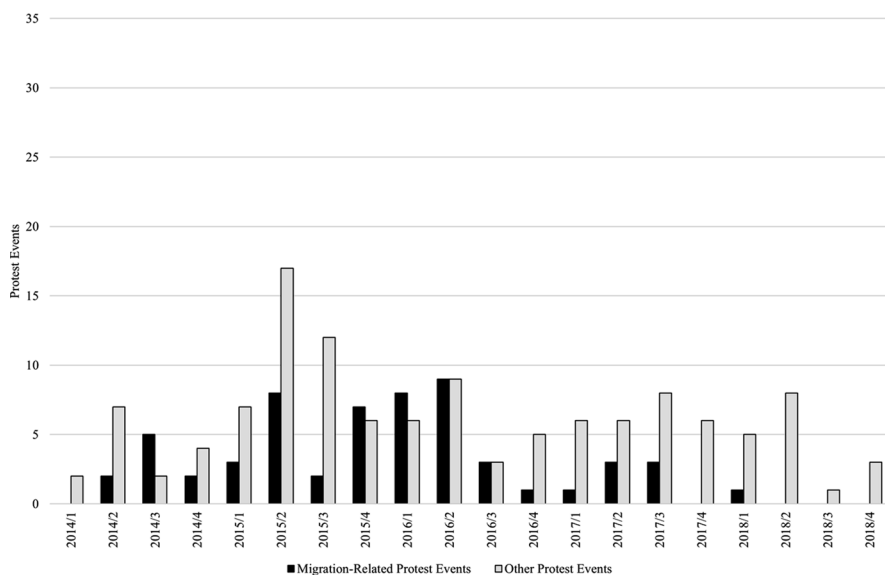


Fig. 7.3 (continued)

were mainly driven by a series of pro-migrant counter-protests against a far-right demonstration in the town.⁴

As a last empirical snapshot of the migration-related protest dynamics in the two towns, we more closely look at protests' dominant orientation, distinguishing between pro-migrant protests advocating for the inclusion of migrants and anti-migrant protests advocating for more restrictive migration policies. In this regard we find first, that in both towns, solidarity is contested—which is mirrored by actors mobilising in support of and against migrants. Second, we find marked differences between the two towns. While protests against migration are more prominent in Plauen (Fig. 7.4a), there is a significant majority of pro-migrant protest events in Neuruppin (Fig. 7.4b). While migration-related protests in both towns include various protests, with organisers and protest forms ranging from demonstrations and flashmobs to property damage, local differences can be discerned. Most of migration-related protests in Neuruppin throughout the observation period were organised by a broad civil society coalition 'Neuruppin bleibt bunt' (Neuruppin remains colourful) advocating for the reception and local inclusion of migrants and organising counterprotests at far-right demonstrations. In Plauen migration-related protests were mainly staged by right-wing populist and right-wing extremist alliances such as 'Wir sind Deutschland' (We are Germany), 'Der III. Weg' (The Third Path), or the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) advocating against the

⁴The parallel increase of migration-related and other protests in Neuruppin in early 2015 is partly due to additional protests by the far-right (and counterprotests) that did not contain explicit migration-related claims and were thus not coded as migration-related.

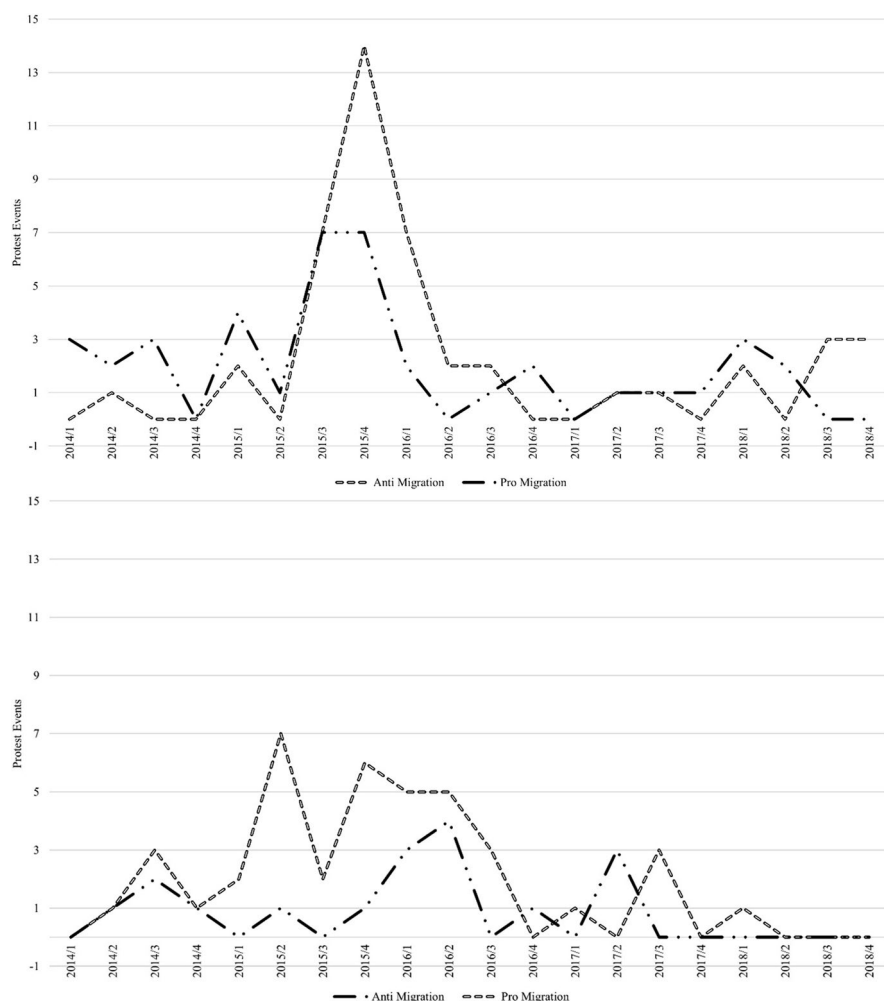


Fig. 7.4 (a) Number of pro- and anti-migrant protest events, Plauen (top). (b) Number of pro- and anti-migrant protest events, Neuruppin (bottom)

reception of refugees, often articulating openly racist claims. Their protests account for more than 50% of all protest events between the third quarter of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016. This is not to say that pro-migrant actors have not engaged in protest and counter-protest against the far right in Plauen, yet the local patterns of migration-related protests markedly differ in their orientation. This was also shown in a network analysis of protest action in the two towns (Hoffmann et al., 2022).

Although both towns have a similarly low level of migration-related diversity and were faced with levels of asylum applications during the refugee reception crisis 2015, the migration-related protest patterns differ markedly. Despite attempts by far-right actors to mobilise, the protests of civil society in solidarity with migrants

have prevailed in Neuruppin, whereas in Plauen, anti-migrant actors have dominated. Below, we further explore these different trajectories, pointing at the structure of local civil society and local political leadership.

7.4 Exploring the Role of Local Contexts for Migrant Solidarity

At first glance, Neuruppin and Plauen have a lot in common. Both are medium-sized towns in east Germany, they have similar socio-structural conditions in terms of basic indicators such as unemployment and foreign population. During the refugee reception crisis in 2015, the number of refugees increased in Neuruppin and Plauen as well as in their surrounding counties. Yet, in both counties the refugee population remained significantly below the German average of 1.9%: 1.5% of the total population in Ostprignitz-Ruppin (1520 refugees) at the end of 2016 and 1.2% in Vogtlandkreis (2735 refugees).

In fact, the findings of the protest event analysis reveal a similar trend: in both Neuruppin and Plauen the general protest activity peaked in 2015 and decreased quickly in the second half of 2016. The proportion of migration-related protests in both towns declined from the end of 2016 onwards.

There are, however, significant local differences. While pro-migrant protests prevailed in Neuruppin, the situation in Plauen was characterised by protests directed against liberal migration policy. Although both towns were faced with similar challenges given the sudden increase in refugees in 2015, the local engagement with migration differed in this respect. How can these differences be explained? The socio-psychological ‘contact hypothesis’ suggests that the frequency of contact between locals and refugees is an important factor for explaining variations in migration-related conflict (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Given the similarly low exposure to migrants and refugees, however, this thesis cannot explain the differences between the two towns.

Instead, a bird’s eye view of the local context helps to explain these dissimilarities in protest activity. The differing political contexts and ‘political opportunity structure’ (Meyer, 2004), as described by social movement research, may provide a possible explanation for the varying protest patterns in Neuruppin and Plauen. According to Sidney Tarrow (1994, p. 85), it is the ‘[c]onsistent but not necessarily formal, or permanent, dimensions of the political environment, which provide incentives for people to take collective action.’

In Neuruppin, the strength of left-wing parties in the city council and the relatively low electoral success of the anti-migrant AfD provide political and discursive opportunity structures favouring pro-migrant mobilisation. The arrival of refugees also represented a major social challenge in Neuruppin, causing uncertainty and fear among the local population. However, political decision-makers positioned themselves on the pro-migrant side, which motivated and reassured people to

campaign for the reception and inclusion of refugees and to take a stand against right-wing propaganda. Key players in civil society underlined the positive role of the long-standing mayor, who openly opposed the right-wing ideologies and welcomed refugees (Döbber, 2020). An interview participant said:

The cooperation between the mayor and the action alliance 'Neuruppin bleibt bunt' (Neuruppin stays colourful) is very positive. One example: [On the occasion of the counter-protests against a demonstration by the far-right party NPD] The Mayor appeared on site after a quarter of an hour and held up banners with me. This is one example that shows how committed he was... This pays off (Interview 1, civil society, Neuruppin).

The good relations between municipal actors and organised civil society in Neuruppin date back to at least 2007, when the alliance 'Neuruppin bleibt bunt' (Neuruppin remains colourful) was formed in reaction to a scheduled right-wing extremist demonstration. Ever since, municipal stakeholders and civil society have been committed to taking a stand against right-wing extremism together. These collective experiences of successful mobilisation against right-wing extremism are part of the town's political opportunity structures and connect with another aspect of research on social movements that deals with the formation of collective identities (Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Histories and memories of local mobilisation often shape a region's conflict dynamics for years. Shared experiences—in particular, positive ones such as the successful protest against demonstrations by right-wing radical groups in Neuruppin—can bring people closer. When new potential for conflict arises, the networks developed between local stakeholders can be reactivated. In Neuruppin, key actors in civil society were able to quickly react in the 'long summer of migration' and publicly mobilise in solidarity with migrants. The historical and ongoing threat posed by right-wing protests became the common point of reference for the collective commitment to refugees. In addition to the alliance 'Neuruppin bleibt bunt', joint experiences in the citizens' movement 'Freie Heide', which successfully protested the military training site Wittstock in the 2000s, played a key role in the solidarity actions and the mobilisation of local civil society. In the interviews, key figures in local civil society repeatedly pointed out the importance of the collective politicisation and networking within local civil society during these mobilizations in the past:

The experiences made during the 'Freie Heide' project are a stabilising factor in this region... The fact that this protest that lasted for decades had a positive outcome in the end, has a long-term effect... And we often remember that we fought for the 'Freie Heide' and learned that this can lead to a positive result (Interview 2, civil society, Neuruppin).

In Plauen, the local opportunity structure for pro-migrant mobilisations is overall less favourable than in Neuruppin. Correspondingly, the protest arena around 2015 tends to be characterised by actors opposed to liberal migration policies. Right-wing extremist actors have been active in Plauen for years, and since 2016 largely bundled in the niche party 'III. Weg' (Ruf, 2019). In addition, the protest movement 'Wir sind Deutschland' (We are Germany), formed in autumn 2015, partly resembled PEGIDA (German acronym for 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation

of the Occident') in its nationalist and anti-immigration framing (Middeke, 2016; Ortgies & Rafael, 2015). At the same time, political officials in Plauen have shied away from taking clear positions against both the far right 'III. Weg' and 'Wir sind Deutschland', for whose positions Plauen's mayor expressed explicit sympathy (Müller, 2015). The significantly weaker demarcation by local decision-makers vis-à-vis radical right and nationalist actors compared to Neuruppin fed into a mainstreaming of anti-migrant positions:

With the so-called refugee crisis and PEGIDA and the AfD, etc....this opposition against right-wing activism seems to be frayed. There have been long discussions about whether the AfD has become a bourgeois [instead of right wing] party. Are they only concerned citizens?...I do believe that these right-wing extremist ideas have reached the centre of society (Interview 3, civil society, Plauen).

A recent example of the widespread acceptance of right-wing positions in Plauen is the joint decision by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), AfD, and the neo-Nazi party 'III. Weg' to stop the public funding of a local network focusing on tolerance and an inclusive local society (Röhlig, 2021).

This, in turn, seems to have encouraged anti-solidarity and discouraged pro-migrant mobilisation. In contrast to Neuruppin, where progressive civil society has built strong and heterogenous networks in previous mobilisations, in Plauen, local opposition to right-wing activism is fragmented into a church-based, middle-class platform and an alliance of left-wing activists thus rendering joint protest mobilisation difficult. An interlocutor explains:

If we say we want to take a stand against the Nazis, we have to unite. The fact that this is difficult could be seen last year, as there were so many different points of view (Interview 4, civil society, Plauen).

7.5 Conclusion

This exploration of migration-related protest as one indicator of (anti)solidarity in Plauen and Neuruppin unveils both commonalities and differences. With the arrival of many refugees in Germany in 2015, migration-related protest activity reached a temporary peak in Neuruppin and Plauen. However, the relative importance of migration in local protests soon decreased to levels comparable to those before the 'long summer of migration'. In both towns, the reception of migrants and refugees was contested, mobilising actors in support of 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' solidarity. While pro-migrant protests prevailed in Neuruppin, the majority of protest events in Plauen were directed against a liberal migration policy. These findings underline that in addition to national developments, local social and political contexts decisively influence protest activity and patterns of local migrant solidarity. These local contexts create political and discursive opportunities for local civil society to act.

As our qualitative interviews in the two towns suggest, the positioning of local decision-makers has had an effect on which part of civil society—those advocating

for ‘inclusive’ solidarity with migrants and refugees or those mobilising for an exclusionary anti-solidarity—feel encouraged. Furthermore, our findings document that local solidarity with migrants and refugees depends on reliable networks within civil society as well as collective memories of progressive mobilisation. Such mobilisations have lasting effects as they can be remobilised in support of migrants and in defence against anti-solidarity (see also Steinhilper & Hoffmann, 2024).

This chapter thereby contributes to the literature on solidarity cities in two ways. First, it underlines the contested nature of solidarity and the variation in its local enactment. Second, and relatedly, we argue that a focus on localities beyond the oftentimes more liberal and diverse urban centres can be instructive to carve out how local political leadership and civil society can encourage and discourage local migrant solidarity.

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Chapter 8

The Invisible Boundaries of Sanctuary Cities: Local Policies Towards Undocumented Migrants in Los Angeles During Covid-19



Benjamin Bruce  and Line Crettex 

8.1 Introduction

The city of Los Angeles, California, in the United States is one of the largest and best-known sanctuary cities in the world, and is home to approximately one million undocumented residents (Passel & Cohn, 2019). While the State of California proclaimed itself a sanctuary state in 2017 and Los Angeles County has various sanctuary policies of its own, the metropolitan area surrounding the City of Los Angeles encompasses a more varied group of municipalities and jurisdictions ranging from indifferent to openly hostile to undocumented residents and their needs. This situation raises significant questions of how these local differences within the same urban region affect irregular migrants in their daily lives.

The Covid-19 pandemic gave heightened urgency to these concerns. Local health officials and public authorities took great pains to reassure undocumented residents that they would not face repercussions for seeking medical attention or access to vaccines. These efforts were particularly important given the extreme hostility that was promoted by the Trump administration (2017–2021) towards irregular migrants and were echoed by some local jurisdictions in the metropolitan area.

This chapter addresses the following questions: Did sanctuary policies have a positive impact on irregular migrants' access to health services during the Covid-19 pandemic? What impact did differences in local migratory policies towards the undocumented population in the Los Angeles metropolitan area have on irregular migrants? We draw on an extensive analysis of local migratory and health policies as well as results from the 'Sanctuary Cities as Emerging Borders' Project Database

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and field work conducted before, during, and after the pandemic in the Greater Los Angeles metropolitan area to answer these questions. In doing so, we seek to emphasise the perspective of undocumented migrants in order to better understand the role of local sanctuary policies in facilitating living conditions and navigating the invisible boundaries they face in their daily lives.

8.2 Sanctuary and Undocumented Migration in Los Angeles

The concept of sanctuary originally stems from Judeo-Christian traditions that were carried over to European churches and cities during the Middle Ages (Correia, 2022). The first modern use of the term in reference to local authorities protecting migrant rights was made by the City of San Francisco in 1989 when it passed its ‘City of Refuge’ ordinance, beginning a larger change whereby ‘the focus population of sanctuary practices has shifted from criminals to illegalized migrants and refugees’ (Bauder, 2017, p. 176).¹

The ordinance aimed to provide protection to asylum seekers from El Salvador and Guatemala who were fleeing civil conflicts and lacked official residency status in the United States by prohibiting collaboration between local public officials and federal migration authorities (at the time, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and since 2003, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, hereafter ICE). San Francisco’s City of Refuge ordinance was part of the broader ‘Central American Sanctuary Movement’ that brought together religious and non-religious civil society organisations with municipal authorities in different parts of the United States, and has become an important reference point for global solidarity movements that promote migrants’ rights (Bauder, 2017; O’Brien et al., 2019).

Sanctuary discourse, policies, and practices have become increasingly visible over the last decades in the United States as a part of the increasing polarisation between the two main opposing political parties, Democrats and Republicans, on the question of undocumented migration. Undocumented migrants—that is to say foreign citizens without a valid migratory status in the country—have become primary targets for anti-migrant campaigns that depict these individuals as threats, conflating their lack of migratory status with crime and violence. The ‘illegal immigrant’ has proven to be an effective trope for right-wing politicians, who have been at the origin of efforts to criminalise migratory infractions in a process scholars have called ‘crimmigration’ (Stumpf, 2006) or ‘illegalization’ (Bauder, 2014), which ‘draw[s] attention to national laws, policies, and practices that deny migrants full status or legal residency’ (Bauder, 2017, p. 175). In response, local municipalities, along with other authorities at the county and state levels, have adopted so-called sanctuary policies, which can be generally understood as overtly limiting

¹San Francisco had been preceded as a sanctuary city by Berkeley, California, in 1971, when it gave sanctuary to sailors from a U.S. navy aircraft carrier who were protesting the ongoing war in Vietnam (Ridgley, 2008).

cooperation between local authorities and ICE or as facilitating undocumented migrants' access to local services or both (Bruce et al., 2023).

The City of Los Angeles first passed a resolution declaring itself a sanctuary city in 2017, at the beginning of President Donald Trump's time in office. This was complemented by a series of sanctuary policies enacted through executive directive by then-Mayor Eric Garcetti. In 2023, the city council officially passed a sanctuary city ordinance, ensuring that the policies that had been in effect since 2017 became local law.

However, the 'issue of immigrants' rights' has been 'particularly important in Los Angeles, with its unusually large concentration of often-undocumented immigrant working poor' (Soja, 2010, p. 128), and there have been other policies in place prior to the sanctuary city resolution and ordinance. In particular, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has had a police mandate (Special Order 40) in effect since 1979 regarding undocumented individuals:

undocumented alien status in itself is not a matter for police action. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all employees of this Department to make a personal commitment to equal enforcement of the law and service to the public, regardless of alien status (LAPD, 1979).

In accordance with Special Order 40 and other internal policies, LAPD officers are prohibited from questioning individuals regarding their migratory status, enforcing ICE detainers, and enforcing federal immigration laws (Garcetti, 2017; Rampart Independent Review Panel, 2001). Moreover, undocumented migrants have also been able to access publicly-assisted housing for decades; in 1986, local officials estimated that more than 30% of public housing units might be occupied by undocumented migrants (Nielsen, 1989).

Today, more than one-third of the total population in the City of Los Angeles and slightly less than one-third in Los Angeles County is foreign-born, while almost half of Angelenos (city and county) identify as Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2022). The undocumented population of Los Angeles County in 2019 was estimated at 951,000 people, of which 53% (or 501,000 individuals) were born in Mexico and almost 75% have lived in the United States for ten or more years (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). According to the University of Southern California Dornsife 'State of Immigrants in L.A. County' annual report, in 2019, seven per cent of the county's population was undocumented, while close to one in five Angelenos were either undocumented or live in mixed-status families. Undocumented residents accounted for 13% of those who self-identify as Latino and seven per cent of Asian-Americans, while '30 percent of Latino children live with at least one undocumented parent' and 'about 40 percent of households headed by an undocumented Angeleno are linguistically isolated' (USC Dornsife, 2022, pp. 24, 56). While the report shows the economic precarity and difficulties that irregular migrants face in other domains, it also underscores the integral role of undocumented workers in the local economy, accounting for a substantial portion of the workforce in numerous sectors: 28% in construction, 24% in agriculture, 18% in manufacturing, and 16% of those engaged in entertainment, hospitality, and food services (USC Dornsife, 2022, p. 27).

These numbers reflect the diversity within Los Angeles's undocumented population and the wide variety of challenges they face. Taken together, they also paint a rough portrait of the most common profile of undocumented Angelenos: Latinos (generally Mexicans) who have lived in Los Angeles for over a decade and are well-integrated into the local economy, have families and local networks where mixed-status groups are common, and who continue to face significant economic vulnerability, linguistic barriers, and live with the risk and fear of deportation when accessing public services or interacting with local authorities.

8.3 Invisible Boundaries: Recent Multilevel Sanctuary Initiatives and Patchwork Geographies

Invisible boundaries can be understood along two interconnected axes: one, the domain of competence of specific levels of government; two, the geographic jurisdiction of different political-administrative entities within metropolitan spaces. An example of the first axis would be the issuing of driver's licenses, which in the United States falls under the purview of the states. As a result, municipal support for or opposition to irregular residents has no impact, on this issue, even though having a license may be crucial in avoiding being reported to ICE by local police as it provides undocumented residents with a form of recognised official identification.

An example of the second axis would be, for instance, when driving around a large metropolitan urban area: few people pay attention to the boundaries of the local communities, cities, or counties that they might be passing through. However, for undocumented migrants, it could be of vital importance to know whether the authorities of one jurisdiction might be more likely to stop and report them to migratory authorities than another, and they might actively change their routes to avoid certain areas as a result (for a similar example, see Varsanyi & Provine, 2017). These boundaries condition undocumented migrants' mobility as well as access to public spaces and services, and they are invisible in the sense that they are not usually perceived as real boundaries by citizens or authorised migrants.

At the city level, Los Angeles already had numerous sanctuary policies and practices in place long before declaring itself a sanctuary city; however, Trump's election as president in 2016 led to a groundswell of activity at the local level aimed at creating pro-immigrant policies. Between 2016 and 2017, Los Angeles launched a legal defence fund for residents facing deportation, decriminalised street vending, and prohibited city employees from transmitting residents' personal information to migratory authorities (Macias Jr., 2023). When Eric Garcetti (himself partly of Mexican descent) became mayor in 2013, one of his first actions was to bring back the Office of Immigrant Affairs; in his 2017 Executive Directive 'Standing with Immigrants', he mentions Los Angeles' history as a 'city of immigrants' as justification for a series of additional sanctuary policies that can be summarised as follows (and which became law with the new sanctuary ordinance in 2023):

preventing city resources from being used for immigration enforcement; preventing city employees from assisting ICE when the primary purpose is immigration enforcement; prohibiting city employees from giving immigration authorities special access to city facilities; preventing city employees from gathering or sharing information about documentation status unless it's legally required (Garcetti, 2017; Soto-Martínez, 2023).

At the county level, there are multiple instances of cooperation with these city-led initiatives, such as the aforementioned legal defence fund. In addition, there are initiatives that correspond to the county's specific domains of competence, such as expanding healthcare access for undocumented individuals in 2018, prohibiting the transfer of individuals to ICE without a judicial warrant in 2020, and no longer requiring county employees to be U.S. citizens in 2022 (Marcellino, 2018; Santana, 2020; Scauzillo, 2022). Even more importantly, in 2015 Los Angeles County ended its 287(g) agreement with ICE that had enabled county officials to screen for immigration status in county jails after a criminal conviction. The 287(g) agreements are derived from an addition to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) in 1996 that permits ICE to delegate the enforcement of immigration law to state and local authorities and includes other forms of increased institutional cooperation. It is for this reason that the relationship between the county level and ICE is of particular importance in the United States, given that counties (and more specifically sheriff's departments) run the jail system. As a result, jails are generally the first step in what the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) calls the 'jail-to-deportation pipeline' (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2018), whereby a banal traffic infraction may lead to an undocumented migrant being reported to ICE and eventually deported thereafter (Bruce, 2018).

At the state level, 2017 was also an important year as it marked the passing of California State Senate Bill 54 (SB 54), the 'California Values Act'. SB 54 has generally been interpreted as California's sanctuary state bill, though there were also earlier bills designed to limit and supervise ICE's activities, including the California Trust Act of 2013 and the California Truth Act of 2017. SB 54 specifically limits cooperation between state and local agencies and migratory authorities, stating for instance that 'California law enforcement agencies shall not...use agency or department moneys or personnel to investigate, interrogate, detain, detect, or arrest persons for immigration enforcement purposes' (State of California, 2017). What becomes increasingly difficult to understand at this stage is something that Monica Varsanyi (2012) calls the 'multilayered jurisdictional patchwork', referring to the increasing entanglement, confusion, and conflict between local, state, and federal jurisdictions over immigration enforcement (for another perspective on scale and space, see Kuge and Anders, Chap. 8, this volume). For instance, when SB 54 was proposed and passed, there was still one county in the state that had a 287(g) agreement with ICE: Orange County, located in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. SB 54 rendered 287(g) agreements impossible in California and effectively forced Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens to end the programme in 2017 (Carcamo, 2018).

While the termination of Orange County's 287(g) programme would seem to constitute a victory for pro-sanctuary advocates, it did not lead to greater local

support for undocumented migrants; rather, it put into greater relief the conflicting stances on migration policy that exist at the local level. By 2018, two counties and over a dozen cities in southern California had passed ordinances or filed lawsuits against SB 54, demonstrating that the particularities of specific geographical locations are just as important as levels of government to understand the reach and importance of sanctuary policies for undocumented people in their everyday lives. Orange County in the Greater Los Angeles area is one particularly important example, given its history as the birthplace of significant conservative movements hostile to undocumented migrants, such as Proposition 187 and the Minutemen Project, and the fact that it is itself a geographical patchwork in terms of its political and demographic diversity (Avila et al., 2019). The county includes prominent left-wing sanctuary cities such as Santa Ana, with its large Mexican population, as well as a dozen cities that openly voiced their opposition to SB 54 (see Fig. 8.1). Moreover, it has only recently started leaning Democrat, similar to the rest of the state (Keith, 2018).

This local variability, ranging from indifference to open hostility regarding undocumented migrants and their needs, is one example of the ‘invisible boundaries’ that we argue affect and condition undocumented individuals in their daily lives. Even in a sanctuary state, moving from one county or city to another could mean a greater risk of detention and deportation, depending on local migratory

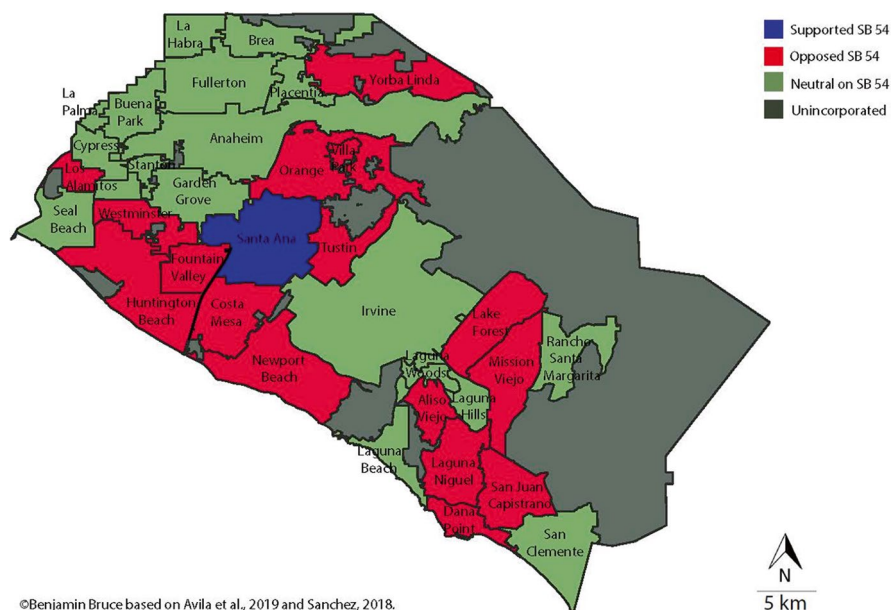


Fig. 8.1 Making invisible boundaries visible: the patchwork geography of local migratory politics in Orange County. This figure shows the different incorporated cities of Orange County and which ones supported SB 54 (blue, only Santa Ana), opposed SB 54 (red), or remained neutral on SB 54 (green). Unincorporated areas fall under the jurisdiction of the county and are shown in grey

policies. Moreover, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the importance of understanding the impact of these boundaries on undocumented migrants, their mobility within the Greater Los Angeles area, their access to health services, and their trust in local authorities becomes even more acute.

8.4 Methodology

We hypothesise that sanctuary policies in Los Angeles had a positive impact on undocumented residents' access to healthcare and public services during the Covid-19 pandemic, and that differences in local migratory policies towards the undocumented population in the Los Angeles metropolitan area can have an impact on irregular migrants' access to public services and spaces, as either a direct result of specific policies or the perception that individuals might have of specific local authorities based on similar policies in the past.

In evaluating these hypotheses, we have relied on a mixed methodology approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative data. We first consider the public policy initiatives undertaken during the pandemic, including information from 15 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted between 2019 and 2022 by both authors with local officials, non-governmental organisations, and undocumented migrants in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Thereafter, we contrast this analysis with a series of profiles derived from the Los Angeles Case Study Database of the CONAHCYT Project 'Sanctuary Cities as Emerging Borders', which includes responses from 414 undocumented Mexican individuals who have resided in the Los Angeles metropolitan area for at least three years. The quantitative database includes a total of 1540 responses from undocumented Mexican migrants in Los Angeles, Dallas-Fort Worth, Chicago, New York, Phoenix, and Atlanta. The survey itself comprises 100 questions and was carried out primarily in the Mexican Consulates in each city between March 2022 and November 2023. Specifically, we focus on the questions that pertain to healthcare access during the pandemic, along with respondents' comments concerning their perception of local authorities as well as their experiences interacting with them.

Our analysis identified three main groups within the database: people who experienced problems when seeking medical attention during the pandemic; people who did not experience any problems when seeking medical attention; and, people who did not require medical attention. We compared these groups, considering a variety of additional factors such as their places of residence within the Los Angeles metropolitan area, their pre-existing health conditions, their fear of deportation, and their perception of local sanctuary policies. We contrasted these quantitative results with the data obtained the qualitative interviews mentioned above, shedding light on the ways by which public authorities responded to the rapidly evolving challenges brought on by the pandemic as well as how sanctuary policies and invisible boundaries were perceived and experienced by undocumented migrants during such an unprecedented moment.

8.5 Results

8.5.1 *The Covid-19 Pandemic in Los Angeles*

The Covid-19 pandemic had a lasting effect on the inhabitants of Los Angeles. A University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) study found that more than half of respondents reported that they or a family member had contracted the virus, while 40% reported having suffered a loss of income and 18% had been unemployed at some point; 76% of parents responded that their children had been ‘substantially hurt, either academically or socially’ as a result of the pandemic (Dunseith, 2021). These numbers are undoubtedly even higher when it comes to undocumented migrants, given that the pandemic accentuated many of the difficulties already experienced by undocumented communities, such as a lack of access to healthcare, economic vulnerability, and a greater risk of infection due to many being frontline workers.

Before the pandemic, undocumented individuals who sought access to healthcare services were already in a precarious situation, having to deal with misconceptions about costs and coverage, long wait times for primary care and appointments, and access difficulties caused by distances and unfamiliarity with the public transportation system (Saluja et al., 2019). These barriers prevented many people with irregular status from seeking medical attention despite being increasingly eligible for treatment thanks to recent policy initiatives. In 2019, the California state healthcare programme Medi-Cal, originally designed to provide coverage only for children and older adults with limited income, was expanded to include individuals between the ages of 19 and 26 years and over 50 years old, regardless of migratory status. In 2024, this coverage was expanded once again to include low-income undocumented adults between the ages of 26 and 49 years, meaning that there is no longer any age limit for eligibility.

For undocumented individuals, there is also a widespread fear of potentially drawing attention to themselves by seeking access to public services and thus exposing themselves to detention and deportation (Asad, 2023). This situation is particularly common for mixed-status families, in which children are eligible for food and healthcare benefits but parents often prefer to forgo public benefits out of fear of potential consequences due to their migratory status. The pandemic compounded this potential risk along with more immediate concerns, such as losing their job or their housing due to infection and the generalised precarious economic conditions. In addition, financial vulnerability was the main reason many undocumented migrants continued working despite the risks involved, thus increasing their exposure to the virus and potential for infection (Kiestner & Vasquez-Merino, 2021).

Another important element of uncertainty involved the changes made in 2019 by the Trump administration to the public charge rule. The public charge rule has existed since the 1882 Immigrant Act and excludes certain individuals from permanent residency if they are deemed unable to take care of themselves and might constitute a potential burden for state services. One way of determining whether an

individual falls under the public charge rule is evaluating the degree to which they have benefited from public services. The amendments in 2019 vastly expanded the list of public assistance programmes that might be used to disqualify an individual from permanent residency status, while also raising the minimum income requirements (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2019). The Trump administration's Public Charge Rule was discontinued by the Biden administration on March 9, 2021 and replaced by a new one on December 23, 2022. However, the changes in 2019 created fear and confusion within undocumented communities and discouraged many individuals from seeking medical services and financial support (Fabi & Cervantes, 2021). One NGO director told us that 'you don't have to be a U.S. citizen to receive the vaccine, but I heard that there were a lot of concerns, especially before the elections, about how safe it was to get the services or even to ask questions' (Interview, Director, Immigrant Rising, Los Angeles, 2021). Similarly, one undocumented individual interviewed mentioned that 'I didn't seek any support because I want to bring my children [from Mexico] and I am not sure if [seeking support] will prevent it' (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 5, Los Angeles, 2021), while another undocumented individual expressed his fear that he might not be able to regularise his migratory status if he sought medical support (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 6, Los Angeles, 2021).

Another new barrier indirectly raised by the pandemic was the widening digital divide between immigrant and U.S.-born residents regarding technological literacy and reliable internet access. During the pandemic, many (or even most) public services, including health and education, switched to a remote online format. Individuals who lacked the proper equipment or internet access were at an immediate disadvantage, creating an additional obstacle to accessing public services. As one undocumented individual told us, 'now you have access to the vaccine everywhere, but during the previous months, you had to make an appointment and many people didn't know how to navigate the internet and so they couldn't make an appointment' (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 7, Los Angeles, 2021). Moreover, internet access also constituted a two-edged sword as rampant misinformation concerning vaccines and the Covid-19 virus led to heightened mistrust and misunderstandings about relief funds, emergency healthcare programmes, and public authorities in general.

The pandemic aggravated the vulnerable situation of undocumented migrants who were one of the groups most exposed to infection. Our results show that the well-being of undocumented migrants depends not only on accessibility to government relief programmes, but, more importantly, on trust and access to information. These findings highlight the importance of local sanctuary initiatives that have succeeded thanks to cooperation between public authorities and local NGOs resulting from their relationships of trust with immigrant communities established long before the pandemic.

8.5.2 *Local Responses and Initiatives*

One of the factors that helped the City of Los Angeles respond to the challenges of the pandemic was the fact that only two years earlier it had elaborated a wide-ranging resiliency plan called ‘Resilient Los Angeles’. Focusing on infrastructure, sustainability, safety, and the local economy, the plan was also sensitive to questions of social inclusion and how distinct local communities faced unequal situations. The plan actively envisaged the creation of partnerships and other forms of cooperation between public authorities, non-governmental organisations, and other local actors that proved essential to its subsequent initiatives in the fight against Covid-19. It also led Los Angeles to join a global network of ‘resilient cities’ through which it exchanged knowledge and best practices with over 200 cities around the world (Resilient Cities Network, 2020).

After the pandemic was declared, the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided access to testing, vaccines, and treatment for Covid-19 at community health centres across the country regardless of migratory status; however, the Act excluded undocumented migrants and mixed-status families from receiving any financial benefits such as stimulus cheques (Kolker, 2020). Emergency care is accessible for individuals with irregular migratory status thanks to the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA), but treatment is no longer covered once a patient becomes stable (Matlin et al., 2022). Despite the necessity of ensuring healthcare access for all members of society during a public health crisis such as a pandemic, connecting undocumented communities with medical care represented a major challenge for public authorities (Cha & McConville, 2021).

The most obvious example is universal and free access to vaccines. Given that diseases do not discriminate based on migratory status, public health policy cannot either. Although varying efforts were made to convince undocumented migrants that they would not be at risk of being detained or deported, mistrust in how public authorities might use their personal information lingered. This has since led certain scholars to suggest that a potential solution might be relying more on trusted and established community-based organisations (Demeke et al., 2022). Our research has come to similar conclusions, highlighting several successful initiatives undertaken by city officials that consciously built on pre-existing ties between undocumented communities and local NGOs.

For instance, in 2021, the city launched the Mobile Outreach for Vaccine Equity (MOVE) programme, an initiative specifically designed to provide mobile vaccine access to vulnerable communities across Los Angeles hit hardest by the pandemic. The director of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs told us how ‘we are different from the rest of the country because we were the first in implementing this new programme, offering universal Covid-19 testing for everyone and having the MOVE program that has been declared the most efficient in the US for providing access to homeless people and other vulnerable communities’ (Interview, Director, LA Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Affairs, Los Angeles, 2021). The programme’s

success was a result of cooperation between city officials and community leaders and organisations—the latter already well-established at the local level and able to orient public authorities to better reach vulnerable populations while also reassuring undocumented migrants that the vaccination sites would indeed be safe spaces for them.

Similarly, the stimulus benefits that the State of California provided for undocumented migrants in 2020 (after they were excluded from those given out federally through the CARES act) were distributed through a network of local NGOs that were in charge of the actual administration of the funds (Holcombe & Shoichet, 2020). The funds did reach many individuals but were hard to obtain: ‘The State of California announced financial support for us, but so many people sought that support and we didn’t manage to receive it. So a friend of mine told us about a local organization that was providing financial support’ (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 8, Los Angeles, 2021). Indeed, local-level initiatives continued to compensate when federal or state initiatives fell short, as one NGO leader recounted: ‘many of the state funds were not available for the undocumented. So, the city created programs, a policy to give direct help, the city passed a policy to prohibit eviction during the pandemic. We worked to get the city to not cut off the electricity and water during the pandemic because they couldn’t pay’ (Interview, Political Advocate, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, Los Angeles, 2021).

Another example is the cooperation between the Mexican Consulate and local authorities. The Consulate set up a vaccination campaign that was open to the general public and established partnerships with other local organisations that were helping with food distribution and information on Covid-19. The diplomat in charge of consular protection at the Mexican consulate told us that ‘thanks to our alliance with local organizations we have become a Covid-19 vaccination and testing site...[LA] County is a great ally, its department of immigrant affairs, as is the sheriff, and the mayor [of Los Angeles] has great esteem for the Mexican community. We have pursued alliances with local authorities and NGOs, some for health issues, community empowerment, and others for advocacy issues’ (Interview, Consul, Mexican Consulate, Los Angeles, 2022). Cooperating with foreign consulates was another successful sanctuary strategy for local authorities given that the consulate was perceived by undocumented migrants as safer than other locations, and there were no concerns that their personal information might be transmitted to U.S. migratory authorities.

For local officials in Los Angeles, addressing the challenges facing undocumented migrants’ access to healthcare meant providing financial support, organising vaccination programmes, and creating information campaigns to deal with misinformation and mistrust through partnerships with local community organisations. However, it also required a broader perspective to take a more holistic approach capable of understanding the importance of free public transportation to reach healthcare and vaccine clinics, paid days off for sick undocumented immigrants, and preventing evictions when undocumented immigrants were sick and unable to pay the bills or rent. In this sense, access to health services involved more than vaccines and Covid-19 tests, and the approach taken by the City of Los Angeles

during the pandemic reflected its stance as a sanctuary city by demonstrating sensitivity to the issues facing undocumented residents and relying on an important network of local organisations to support them, despite intense pressure from the Trump administration to the contrary.

8.6 Access to Health Services

In our analysis of the quantitative data from the ‘Sanctuary Cities as Emerging Borders’ LA Case Study Database (n = 414), we began by dividing the respondents into three groups based on their answer to the question ‘Did you encounter difficulties in receiving medical attention during the Covid-19 pandemic?’

The first group was individuals who responded ‘yes’ and comprised 62 people (15.1%); the second group comprised those responding ‘no’ and included 137 individuals (33.3%); and the third group was individuals who answered that they had not needed medical attention and comprised 213 people (51.7%). We start by focusing on the kinds of difficulties encountered by individuals in the first group and then provide an overview of their views on the risk of deportation and sanctuary policies in comparison with the other two groups. Thereafter, we analyse the perception and impact of invisible boundaries by focusing on respondents residing in contexts more hostile to undocumented migrants.

8.6.1 *Difficulties in Healthcare Access and Views on Deportation and Sanctuary*

For the 62 undocumented individuals who experienced problems accessing health services during the pandemic, the main reason cited was that healthcare services were overloaded (87.5%), along with linguistic difficulties (30.4%), lacking required documentation (30.4%), and problems concerning payment and costs (16.1%).² Several additional reasons were given, such as the switch to online consultations; transportation difficulties; the attitude of medical professionals (described as ‘rude’, ‘unhelpful’, or ‘scared’); closed clinics; lack of time; a greater number of requirements and precautionary measures; and a shortage of medications.

What is of particular interest is the general profile of the individuals in this group in comparison with undocumented migrants who did not encounter problems in accessing healthcare services or who did not require any treatment. Group 1 respondents were generally older, on average 48.5 years old (vs. 44.3 years old for Group 2 and 41.5 years old for Group 3), slightly more were women (59.7% vs. 54.0% and 46.7%), and although they had been living in the United States for a longer period

² Respondents could pick more than one answer.

of time (23.0 years vs. 21.4 and 19.4), they had lower educational qualifications and were less proficient in English.

Group 1 was also much more economically vulnerable. More of them had lost their job due to the pandemic (12.9% vs. 2.9% and 4.2%), while a greater number responded that they did not earn enough to cover their basic needs (35.0% vs. 26.8% and 17.7%) and that they frequently or sometimes had problems paying their bills (72.6% vs. 48.9% and 45.1%). Moreover, fewer individuals in Group 1 had a car (40.3% vs. 64.2% and 65.3%), a bank account (45.2% vs. 59.1% and 51.6%), or a local identification (49.2% vs. 57.5% and 56.2%). They also relied much more on public transportation as their main mode of transportation (45.2% vs. 17.5% and 17.4%) and used internet and social media less (69.4% vs. 76.6% and 83.1%). Group 1 also included more individuals who received assistance during the pandemic due to their migratory status (35.5% vs. 23.4% and 19.7%), generally stimulus checks from the State of California, rent relief from the City of Los Angeles, or help from local churches or schools. Perhaps most importantly, a much higher percentage responded that they had a chronic illness (44.3% vs. 21.3% and 10.4%) and qualified their overall health as 'bad' or 'very bad' (29.0% vs. 6.6% and 3.8%). A greater number stated that they had health insurance (64.5% vs. 43.8% and 43.7%), although generally it was state-funded coverage, while far fewer had private insurance (26.8% vs. 40.0% and 35.5%), and they preferred local health centres, clinics, and hospitals over private practices.

In the in-depth interviews, respondents highlighted the difficulties of only having access to basic healthcare: 'if it's a flu or something, they give us medicine, but not for a chronic illness because of our immigration status...Us [undocumented individuals], we don't have the right to get sick' (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 9, Los Angeles, 2021). Similarly, another undocumented woman stated that she only had free access to emergency services and always paid for other services because she did not have health insurance (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 7, Los Angeles, 2021).

All told, the undocumented individuals who experienced problems accessing healthcare were older, less educated, spoke less English, had more chronic health problems, were less mobile, less technologically literate, and were significantly more economically vulnerable than those who did not encounter problems accessing healthcare or did not require treatment. In other words, those who had the most difficulties during the pandemic were those who were already the most vulnerable and whose pre-existing health, financial, and educational predicaments were aggravated and exacerbated by the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic.

The differences between these three groups were not limited to the characteristics mentioned above. Our analysis shows that the Group 1 respondents had markedly different views on sanctuary policies and the risk of deportation than Group 2 and Group 3 respondents. Group 1 respondents generally live more in fear of detention and deportation (70.5% vs. 54.0% and 59.6%). Moreover, they were much more afraid of immigration enforcement during the Trump administration (79.0% vs. 63.5% and 60.6%) and reduced their time outside the home and took additional measures when they had to leave (79.0% vs. 58.4% and 62.4%).

Perhaps most tellingly, even though many more Group 1 respondents reported suffering from a chronic disease and having health insurance, a much higher number responded that they had avoided seeking healthcare services due to the fear of being detained or deported (40.3% vs. 15.3% and 12.3%) and that they had felt discriminated against when receiving treatment (48.4% vs. 8.8% and 11.7%). On the other hand, there was no real difference in terms of vaccination rates between the groups (90.3% vs. 92.9% and 85.5%), although Group 1 respondents did cite their doctor's recommendation more frequently as a reason for getting vaccinated than did those in the other two groups (28.6% vs. 7.9% and 8.2%). The general conclusion is that those who were most vulnerable and had the greatest need of medical treatment are the very same individuals who suffered the most from the fear of deportation and the structural conditions that rendered access even more difficult. Nevertheless, and for the same reason, the fact that vaccination rates were similar for all three groups can be seen as a success for public health officials as it shows that they succeeded in reaching the most vulnerable groups amongst the undocumented migrants we surveyed.

At the same time, a surprising result was how those in Group 1 perceived sanctuary cities and policies. In comparison with the other two groups, Group 1 respondents were less openly supportive of sanctuary cities (59.7% vs. 77.4% and 62.7%) and they did not agree as readily that living in a sanctuary city made their everyday life easier (43.6% vs. 53.3% and 50.1%). In fact, they were more sceptical about the impact of sanctuary policies on facilitating access to public services, reducing the risk of deportation, diminishing discrimination, improving work opportunities, and generally about whether living in a sanctuary city made any difference.

We argue that there are two explanations for this result. The first can be summed up by one Group 1 open response: 'it [a sanctuary city] only protects, but everything is very expensive'. As explained above, Group 1 individuals face a host of compounded and interrelated structural difficulties that make their overall situation (and access to healthcare in particular) more complicated—one of the most prevalent being their economic vulnerability. Secondly, despite the success of sanctuary policies and community partnership initiatives that helped to get more undocumented residents vaccinated, the anxiety caused by the constant risk of detention and deportation does not disappear. In the words of one NGO director, 'the fear didn't just go away when Biden came. When you sign something [official and provide personal information], people get afraid about talking about their living situation, [like] in the census. The trauma of Covid has affected the undocumented more dramatically due to the exposure' (Interview, Director of Higher Education, Immigrant Rising, Los Angeles, 2021).

8.6.2 *Invisible Boundaries*

We evaluated the impact of invisible boundaries in terms of the local differences in migratory policy by two methods: first, contrasting the answers of 15 survey respondents who lived in more hostile local contexts (12 in Orange County and three in

Santa Clarita, one of the only cities in Los Angeles County that opposed SB 54), and second, through qualitative interviews that directly addressed the topic. Although not all residents of Orange County lived in cities that opposed SB 54, and in fact four lived in Santa Ana, which is itself a sanctuary city, we have included them here in consideration of their proximity to neighbouring cities that are hostile and the fact that they were still within Orange County itself.

Despite the small sample, amongst those who lived in Orange County and Santa Clarita, there was a higher number who had experienced difficulties in accessing healthcare during the pandemic. The main problems were (in decreasing order of importance): language, over-saturated services, lack of documentation, and financial problems—in other words, more weight was given to linguistic problems than over-saturated services when compared with the overall sample. Moreover, they also reported a greater degree of fear of being detained or deported; as one undocumented migrant in Orange County recounted, ‘I always drive carefully, I’m always looking ahead to make sure there are no checkpoints up ahead...and try to stay in my neighbourhood...and yes I’m nervous, scared, but that’s just how it is’ (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 1, Anaheim, 2019). A greater number had avoided medical treatment due to their migratory status and stated that they had felt discriminated against when receiving treatment; almost half considered there was some risk of being detained at a hospital as compared with approximately one-third overall.

Even more alarming, far fewer believed that vaccination sites were safe spaces for undocumented migrants, and a lower proportion reported having been vaccinated, with half of those who had not been vaccinated citing their fear of migratory controls as the principal reason. Finally, fewer individuals had heard of sanctuary cities, and even when they were given a general definition, they expressed more scepticism and less support compared to the overall sample. These results suggest that living in jurisdictions with more hostile local migration policies can have a direct impact on undocumented migrants’ access to health services, whether directly for policy reasons or indirectly due to the higher degree of perceived risk of detention and deportation.

As a colleague of the mayor of Los Angeles told us, ‘it can be more dangerous to be in a more conservative city or county for undocumented immigrants’ (Interview, Former Cultural Affairs Commissioner, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles 2020). Not only are undocumented migrants frequently aware of these differences, but the above data also seem to indicate that living in such contexts results in greater degrees of anxiety concerning deportation, more frequent instances of discrimination, and greater difficulties overall in accessing public services. Even church services can be affected, as attested by one reverend in the city of Los Alamitos in Orange County, which was the first city to oppose SB 54: ‘Immigrant worshippers are less likely to come and participate in church services because of their fear that Los Alamitos and its law enforcement officials are helping deport members of our community’ (Avila et al., 2019, p. 5).

The Border Patrol interior checkpoints constitute another kind of boundary, one of which is located just outside San Clemente, at the southernmost point of the Greater Los Angeles area. There are between 100 and 200 of these checkpoints

throughout the country within 100 miles (160 km) of the international borders, and between 30 and 40 of them are permanent, such as the one in San Clemente. As one undocumented migrant recounted, ‘there are places in California where I can’t go. For example, my son studies in San Diego and I can’t accompany him because he’s very close to the border. There is a checkpoint in San Clemente and I am afraid to go south’ (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 4, Los Angeles, 2021). This man added that he feels safer in Los Angeles and often travels north to Santa Barbara or even to Las Vegas; just as by many of our interviewees, this checkpoint was mentioned as the real border towards the south. In this sense, we can distinguish between interior boundaries that effectively function as the real borders for undocumented migrants within this 100-mile region and the invisible boundaries between cities with differing local migratory policies, which have a less evident yet nevertheless very real impact on the everyday lives of undocumented migrants.

At the same time, invisible boundaries also involve the question of scale. For instance, the fact that the State of California permits the issuing of driver’s licences to irregular migrants facilitated numerous cases of vaccine access. As one man told us, ‘I was not afraid to ask for the vaccine because they were clearly saying not to be afraid, that they were not going to ask, they only asked for identification’—and more specifically, his California driver’s licence (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 4, Los Angeles, 2021). Regardless of the city or county where this individual might have received the vaccine, the fact that he could use a state-issued form of identification facilitated his access to health services at a crucial moment during the pandemic and worked in tandem with sanctuary-inspired policies, such as the City of Los Angeles’s mobile vaccination initiative. The question of scale, in terms of level of government and domains of competence, adds another layer of complexity to understanding the impact of invisible boundaries, and can function either as a limitation or as an additional tool for undocumented migrants, depending on the local context.

Finally, for some individuals, living and working or both in cities where there are fewer immigrants (or Latinos, Mexicans, etc.) can represent a strategic decision to distance themselves from the places where most irregular migrants are thought to be located and thus where it is more likely that ICE is active. For instance, one interviewee cited this as one reason for living in Anaheim as opposed to Santa Ana, the latter having both ‘more crime’ and more risk of detention (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 1, Anaheim, 2019). This act of distancing oneself is not just a question of choosing between geographic locations, but can also be physically performed through one’s appearance, forms of speech, and behaviour, and reflects what García calls ‘legal passing’: ‘a form of protective social camouflage that forcibly distances people from their own national, ethnic, and cultural identities to avoid being categorized as undocumented’ (García, 2019, p. 134).

Indeed, for another undocumented migrant, spending time in upscale and predominantly White areas such as Huntington Beach was perceived as *safer* than being in predominantly Mexican Santa Ana, given that she believed there was generally less risk of being detained by migratory authorities as long as she dressed and acted correspondingly—as she put it, ‘your appearance is what attracts attention’

and ‘they treat you as you look (*como te ven, te tratan*)’ (Interview, Undocumented Migrant 3, Anaheim, 2019). As García points out, ‘legal passing is a way to navigate restrictive destinations, but as it subordinates immigrants to make them more like the native born, it reveals and advances the coercive power of restrictive subnational immigration law’ (García, 2019, p. 6). Invisible boundaries are thus not only a product of geographic jurisdictions and scale but also manifest themselves at the individual level in one’s clothing, gestures, language, and physical appearance, all of which must be monitored and self-policed depending on the spaces in which undocumented migrants find themselves.

8.7 Sanctuary During Crisis: Lessons Learned

We have argued in this chapter that sanctuary policies had a positive impact on undocumented migrants’ access to health services in the Los Angeles metropolitan area during the Covid-19 pandemic. By focusing on levels of government, we have shown how different initiatives, primarily at the city level but also the county and state levels, had a direct influence by allaying fears of possible detention or deportation thanks to extensive cooperation with local community organisations and even foreign consulates.

Despite high levels of mistrust and misinformation, the partnerships that public authorities established with trusted civil society organisations mitigated these challenges, such as in the cases of the mobile vaccine initiative, information campaigns on healthcare access, and stimulus benefits for residents with irregular status (for a similar argument but concerning immigrant entrepreneurship, see Carr-Lemke, Chap. 8, this volume). Perhaps the most telling evidence of this success was the high vaccination rate amongst survey respondents who encountered difficulties in receiving medical attention during the pandemic (Group 1), suggesting that local authorities’ public outreach and vaccination efforts had succeeded in reaching some of the most vulnerable segments of the undocumented population.

Just as the Covid-19 pandemic did not discriminate based on migratory status, there are many issues where excluding undocumented migrants from local public policy can have a detrimental effect on society as a whole. The lower vaccine rates and scepticism concerning the safety of vaccination sites amongst our survey respondents in Orange County and the city of Santa Clarita should constitute warnings for public authorities who do not take the necessary steps to reassure and communicate with the most vulnerable members of their populations. Conversely, sanctuary policies can have a beneficial impact in this regard by countering forms of structural discrimination and taking into account the particular circumstances of undocumented residents, while focusing on their needs as members of the community.

Nevertheless, as our subsequent analysis shows, many other factors contribute to undocumented migrants’ perception of sanctuary policies, which are seen with more scepticism as issues concerning social, health, and economic vulnerability

become more pressing. Moreover, our findings provide evidence that the invisible boundaries that arise due to hostile local migratory policies do have an impact on undocumented migrants as limiting and conditioning factors, affecting both their access to public services and mental health.

Invisible boundaries can materialise directly through policies and practices in individual geographical localities and at certain levels of government depending on jurisdiction, but also indirectly through perceptions that can be fuelled by public discourse and broader imaginaries concerning specific spaces. The case of Orange County is particularly telling, given the variegated landscape of municipal reactions to California's Sanctuary State Bill SB 54, including the numerous localities that have been in favour of greater cooperation between ICE and local law enforcement and opposed to state-level sanctuary policies.

Our results show that undocumented migrants are both aware of these differences and negatively impacted by them, as seen by the lower levels of healthcare access and Covid-19 vaccine rates in Orange County. The research also shows that migrants can integrate this knowledge into their own strategies, electing to reside or work in ostensibly less welcoming areas precisely because they may perceive there to be a lower risk of being targeted by migratory authorities, although this decision may ultimately reinforce hostile migratory laws at an even deeper personal and psychological level.

Acknowledgements The research for the chapter was funded by and conducted as part of the Mexican National Council of Humanities, Science, and Technology (CONAHCYT) Project 'Sanctuary Cities as Emerging Borders. Transnational Dynamics and Lived Spaces of Undocumented Mexicans in the United States' (Proyecto de Ciencia Básica CONAHCYT 288847 'Las ciudades santuario como fronteras emergentes. Dinámicas transnacionales y espacios vividos de mexicanos indocumentados en Estados Unidos'). For more information, see ciudadessantuario.com. The authors would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Project 'Soli*City: Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity, and Hospitality in Global Perspectives' for its support, as well as its director Dr. Harald Bauder and three anonymous peer reviewers for their careful reading and helpful comments.

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Chapter 9

Mexico City as a Sanctuary City: Gender Perspectives in Sanctuary Policies



Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen  and Martin Bak Jørgensen 

9.1 Introduction

Mexico City has followed the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action in its progression towards establishing sanctuary city status. In this chapter, we investigate Mexico City's declaration towards developing the framework for becoming a sanctuary city as an urban policy approach, committing to protect the rights and needs of migrants in a time when these are not being protected by the nation-state. Despite the lack of protection from federal authorities, the sanctuary city's promotion of institutional solidarity and responsibility-sharing through cooperation across institutions, social organisations, and the public provides a layout for incorporating solidarity and protection into urban spaces. Efforts taken to show solidarity and offer protection build on the experiences of the people most affected while also incorporating the knowledge and voices of a variety of actors in the formal and informal institutional framework of accommodating migrants' needs in Mexico City.

The chapter explores the role of sanctuary cities from a gendered perspective and examines how and if sanctuary policies minimise gender disparities and reach gender equality in the context of Mexico City and the city's efforts to protect migrant women. The chapter draws on an intersectional approach to understand and analyse the experiences of migrant women and examines how an intersectional strategy has been used in practice (by local actors) in the efforts to protect the rights of migrants—first, in the context of general migration, and, second, by an additional focus on the possibilities of protection in an urban setting. The focus on gender, migration, and equality includes the interrelated types of discrimination that migrant women face, such as, but not limited to, variables of migration status, race/ethnicity, and social class. We examine the role of the Mexico City-based non-governmental

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organisation *Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración* (Institute for Women in Migration, hereafter referred to as IMUMI) in assisting migrant women in Mexico City and across the country. The organisation does advocacy work and supports migrant women in a multifaceted manner, including legal aid and research.

The chapter aims to explore how the institutional and organisational frameworks in a Mexican context respond to the intersectional experience of migrant women in the efforts to protect the rights of migrants and what opportunities the urban scale can offer in the form of a sanctuary city. The chapter outlines and addresses the main concerns for the safety and protection of migrant women, in addition to the responses by the Mexican government and IMUMI.

We begin with an outline of our theoretical framework, including a discussion of urban sanctuary policies and intersectional approaches. This enables us to discuss the sanctuary policies in Mexico City from a gendered perspective. Next, we outline the context for our research. Here we first provide a brief outline of the Mexican context from a migration perspective as well as the particular context of Mexico City. We then present IMUMI in more detail. In the third part of the chapter, we continue with the analysis, discussing first the ‘Mexico Plan of Action’ and, second, examining how the plan subsequently informed policymaking. This part is followed by an analysis of how discrimination is tackled within the sanctuary framework. We end the chapter with a concluding discussion pointing to future policy interventions.

The chapter offers three recommendations. First, we advocate for the incorporation of a stronger gender perspective into Mexico City’s future sanctuary efforts in migrant protection. Second, we suggest that the intersectional aspects of the experiences of migrant women should be acknowledged and incorporated in the policies and practices. Third, we emphasise the urgency for the municipality to take a stand against the discriminatory practices performed at the federal level in regard to migration.

9.2 On Methodology

The chapter’s scope focuses on implemented policies between 2004 and 2023, starting with the Mexico Plan of Action. We chose this period because our focus is on whether political action has been taken since the implementation of the Mexico Plan of Action, and Mexico City’s sanctuary city declaration—hence, covering both events, and the time after. This perspective is supported by existing literature, which is used to identify contradictions in the Mexican government’s continued pledge to protect and improve the lives of migrants and women in Mexico during the period under study. The research is based on the MA Thesis work by the first author in the spring of 2023 (Drejer-Jensen, 2023). The chapter further investigates the topic through in-depth interviews with psychologist and former employee at the Mexico City municipality, Carolina Carreño Nigenda, along with employees from IMUMI namely, Lorena Cano Padilla and Luisa Alvarez Icaza Pastor.

Located in Mexico City, IMUMI is a non-governmental organisation specialised in providing assistance for migrant women and children and promoting their rights in the Mexican and, to some extent, the U.S. contexts. The organisation was founded in 2010 by Gretchen Kuhner and works with policy advocacy, research, and legal representation to better the living conditions of migrant women and their families (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). The organisation emphasises the importance of a combination of improvement of public policies and education not just for the migrant women directly affected but for the general public also. IMUMI's work acknowledges the importance of including intersectional factors and the need to engage multiple levels of society in securing migrant protection, and thus includes collaboration between policymakers, service providers, and the media.

As an organisation, IMUMI has a collaborative network highlighting the following 12 organisations in Latin America and the United States: *Grupo de Trabajo Sobre Política Migratoria*, *Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en México*, *Women in Migration Network*, *Observatorio de Racismo en México y Centroamérica*, *Welcome with Dignity*, *Observatorio Género y Covid-19 en México*, *Justice in Motion Protecting Migrant Rights Across Borders*, *Freedom Network USA*, *Mesa de coordinación transfronteriza migraciones y género*, *Bloque Latino Americano sobre Migración*, *Mujer Salud y Migración*, and *Acción Migrante Org* (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.). These organisations focus on the protection of migrant rights and are mentioned on IMUMI's website, adding to their transparency and image from the perspective of potential supporters, other service providers, and so on.

The organisation's collaborative network does not limit itself to similar non-governmental organisations but also comprises shelters and health institutions to provide multifaceted assistance to their users (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). Furthermore, approximately 30 NGOs within the theme of migration are operating within the city. In attempts to ensure sufficient changes, the collaborative networks in which IMUMI engages include the local Mexico City government to report on observations and follow the changing urgency in needs amongst migrant women. Still, a gap is described between the Congress, local city congress, and the general migratory and asylum themes, which in Mexico is handled on a federal level (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023).

In 2023, Claudia Sheinbaum, then-mayor of Mexico City, had referred to migrants as 'our brothers and sisters', expressing unity, equality, and an obligation to provide assistance. Still, a lack of direction and outline of *how* this should be done has been missing (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). Since becoming the country's first woman president in 2024, there is hope that positive changes will spread from the federal to city level on the point of migration and its intersectional aspects, unifying assistance on the different levels, and finally answering *how* this should be done.

Research dialogues were conducted with Raúl Delgado Wise and Jorge Morales Cardiel, who have both worked extensively on the topic of migration in the Mexican context. When referring to previous research conducted in Toronto, references are made to an interview conducted with Edgar Valderrama Media from FCJ Refugee

Centre. The obtained material is used with the permission of the informants, including the use of their names. The chapter followed the ethical research guidelines stipulated in 'The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity'.

9.3 Urban Sanctuary Policies and the Gender Gap: Theoretical Approaches

When Margaret Godoy and Harald Bauder (2022) explored urban migrant protection and sanctuary and solidarity in the Global South, including Latin America, they highlighted the general lack of literature on this topic. While there is substantial literature on municipal responses to migration in the context of integration, the literature with a few exceptions (Bambach, Chap. 2, this volume; Stefoni, Bravo, & Stang, Chap. 1, this volume) does not make a clear and explicit connection to the topic of sanctuary or solidarity cities.

Drawing on the literature on sanctuary and solidarity cities in a broad international context, we examine how the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action's 'Cities of Solidarity' programme could offer an alternative to the federal immigration policies in the protection of migrants. To explore how gender perspectives are incorporated into Mexico City's sanctuary cities practices and to gain a well-rounded understanding of its complexity, we examine both the factors hindering the protection of migrant women and the actions taken in their defence. We introduce an approach that includes perspectives on intersectionality, creating disparities that are both influenced by culture, patriarchy, and policy approaches.

First, an important concept is intersectionality, here set in relation with women's experience in the context of migration. An intersectional approach emphasises the need to differentiate between the diversity of experiences of migrants based on categories of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and migratory statuses. This differentiation is essential to understand measures taken to ensure the protection of migrants and the policies introduced to secure this goal. Second, perspectives on gender in policymaking led to the introduction of Theresa Rees's (1998) three approaches to incorporating a gender perspective in policy creation, namely, the concepts of equal treatment, positive action, and gender mainstreaming. Incorporating intersectionality and women's migrant experience into these three approaches to include gender in policymaking sheds light on different ways to overcome gender inequality. This approach is relevant in the examination of past and future implementations of policies to secure progress, achievable solutions, and lasting societal change while challenging patriarchal and heteronormative societal practices that have been shaping society and keeping women unequal to men.

It is of importance to add an intersectional dimension to the topic of migration, including the correlation of gender and migration, as there has been a lack of attention given to migrant women throughout history. Hence, as stated by Monica Boyd, accounts of migration throughout history were often genderless (thus gender-blind) or focused on the male experience, with women and children placed in a category of

being ‘extras’ to the man (in Mora & Piper, 2021, p. 19). While changes have occurred through time, the risks faced by migrant women—especially those without legal status—are severe, including exploitation, assault, and aggression, with some describing sexual assault as ‘the price you pay for crossing the border’ and thus emphasising the frequent occurrences of assault (Marrujo, 2009, p. 31). In Mexico, a country facing severe issues with gender-based violence and femicides, women and especially migrant women without status are especially at risk.

A second theoretical intervention is how to locate and situate the urban scale. The focus and scale of the city brings a different perspective and practical alternatives that can challenge national governments and political inertia. Throughout the world, cities have responded to the disjuncture between exclusionary national migration and residency policies, and the need to be inclusive at the local scale (Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018). Cities must find a way to secure access to legal residency, social protection, and cultural belonging, and accept the physical presence of irregular/illegalised migrants (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). This is not an easy task, as national governments hold the right to issue visas, permits, residence, etc., yet the new municipalist surge demonstrates that the municipality is becoming a strategically crucial site for the organisation of transformative social change (Roth & Russell, 2018). The city can be—and is—a strategic location for an emergent and active citizenship. When understanding issues of hospitality, sanctuary, and solidarity the urban scale becomes especially important when analysing how solidarity can become institutionalised and lead to alternative infrastructures of inclusion. Cities can serve as both empirical sites for understanding practices of solidarity as well as providing an analytical lens. However, cities in themselves are not inherently inclusionary or progressive, as opposed to the nation-state. As studies on immigrant integration have shown, it is the particular urban context that shapes the approach to migration issues and the local politics of migration (e.g., De Graauw and Vermeulen, 2016). A similar understanding makes Bertie Russell (2019, p. 1) argue that ‘rather than essentializing cities as inherently progressive or democratic, the municipal is instead becoming framed as a “strategic front” for developing a transformative politics of scale’. It thus also picks up on Mark Purcell’s claim that scales ‘are socially constructed strategies to achieve particular ends. Therefore, any scale or scalar strategy can result in any outcome. Localization can lead to a more democratic city, or a less democratic one’ (Purcell, 2006, pp. 1921–1922). In this chapter we discuss how the politics taking place on the different scales in the Mexican context may or may not lead to efficient and comprehensive sanctuary policies.

9.4 The Context: Mexico and Mexico City as a Sanctuary City

Before describing the context of Mexico City, it is important to also define the ambiguity of Mexico as a sending, transit, and receiving country at the same time. Most migrants fleeing the Northern Triangle leave their home countries due to

life-threatening situations, where the risks and dangers connected to escaping—the perilous journey and risk of getting denied at the border—are deemed less dangerous than staying in their country of origin. Also, fears of facing violence in case of returning caused by rejection from border control are of worry for the migrant as a large part of the violence that they are fleeing is related to gangs controlling communities, making returning migrants an easy target (Cornelius, 2018).

Since Mexico is a country of simultaneously sending, transit, and receiving of migrants, it is essential to examine the differences that separate these types of migration. This differentiation is important as it influences the country's approach to migration policies and the intentions and patterns of the migrant. Viewing a country as a 'sending country' signals that individuals from there migrate either regularly or irregularly towards a country of destination. In the Mexican context, as IMUMI describes, many Mexicans travel to the United States in search of the American dream. Moreover, 'Mexico plays a changing role in the context of international migration dynamics. Its shift from being a country of high emigration to becoming, increasingly, a country of transit has given the country a new regional function' (Cardiel, 2022, p. 274). This shift has left migrants in a more precarious state, as border control and border security policies are targeted at controlling and containing irregular transit migrants. It has placed organised crime groups in a position to benefit from the desperate and precarious situation in which border policies place migrants.

When looking at transit migration through Mexico to the United States, Wayne Cornelius (2018) describes government policy coordination between the two nations, dating back to the 1980s, with Mexico serving as what he describes as a 'buffer state' between the United States and Central America. This was done through a variety of approaches, including controlling transportation routes leading north (through the country, *frontera vertical*), tightening temporary visa requirements for Central Americans, and accepting help from U.S. government agencies to help keep non-status migrants away from the U.S. border in the 1990s and 2000s (Cornelius, 2018). Finally, Mexico also takes the role of a receiving country or a 'country of destination' for migrants traveling from Central and South America. Some migrants end up regarding Mexico as a place to settle and thus become situated in frameworks not only developed to offer protection but integration in different forms.

When viewing sanctuary cities in a Mexican context, the government of Mexico City declared the city sanctuary in April 2017 (Cardiel, 2022, p. 274). Still, opinions about the sanctuary commitment have not been universal, as there has been a change in government and contradicting statements made by Mexican politicians about whether the country should hold its position as a country of asylum and refuge or if it should be more restrictive. This inconsistency has been influenced by the Mexican state's collaboration with the United States, where it can be argued that continuously changing immigration policies play a hindering role in the process of incorporating long-lasting solutions for the assistance of migrants. Hence, as argued by Cardiel, Mexico City's position as a sanctuary city is still in its early stages and it has the potential to become either inclusive or exclusive, depending on the extent to which it is exposed to and pressured by discriminatory public policies regarding

migration (Cardiel, 2022, p. 279). In this case, the city has become, as described by Zygmunt Bauman, ‘the dump of the problems generated and gestated globally’, aiming at finding local solutions to global problems (quoted in Cardiel, 2022). Bauman’s statement was supported through the interview with IMUMI’s Lorena and Luisa, who, through their perspectives on both their work with migrants and collaboration with the municipality of Mexico City, had seen the results of, to some degree, a passive stance from the government’s side. They mentioned the lack of space in shelters and long waiting times for processing of asylum documents as the inevitable consequence of the migrant situation at both the country’s northern and southern borders (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, March 23, 2023).

The indecisive perspective on non-status migration is reflected through policies such as the 2008 re-amended General Law of Population that decriminalised non-status migration and assistance of individuals without legal status, whereas before being without legal status was punishable by 10 years of imprisonment (Cornelius, 2018, p. 19). Still, there are contradicting government actions in treating migrants, including violations such as extortion, trafficking, enforced disappearances, and homicides. As pointed out by Cornelius (2018), while non-status migration has been decriminalised, tens of thousands of non-status migrants from the Northern Triangle are brought to detention centres each year, with a further increase of detention centres from 22 to 50 in the period between 2000 and 2011 (Cornelius, 2018, p. 19). The latter does not align with the process of both decriminalisation and the ambitions presented in the Mexico Plan of Action, which views seeking and receiving asylum as a fundamental human right, reaffirmed in the Declaration (Organization of American States, 2004).

9.5 Analysis and Discussion

9.5.1 *Mexico Plan of Action*

The Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America (MPA) is a top-down initiative drawn up in 2004 to protect refugees and internally displaced persons. Its fundamental goal was to ‘promote concrete action: to improve, systematise and establish precedents of good practices for all those in need of protection, assistance, and durable solutions’ (UNHCR, 2007, p. 5). It reaffirmed the obligations of states to respect the principle of non-discrimination and acknowledged the gender perspective of persecution. Hence, the intersectional aspect of migrant women’s experience is recognised and sought to be considered in the planning and execution of protection and humanitarian assistance efforts regarding refugees, migrants, and individuals seeking asylum. Focusing on solidarity and responsibility-sharing, the concepts of cities of solidarity, regional solidarity resettlement, and borders of solidarity were introduced in the form of programmes, where parallels can be drawn between the ‘cities of solidarity’

programme and the sanctuary city (Bambach, Chap. 2, this volume). Stefania Eugenia Barichello (2016) states that the MPA is a step towards enhanced protection of human rights and the affirmation of the universality of human dignity through its point of departure in solidarity and cooperation.

Moreover, the Cities of Solidarity programme aims to provide a concrete framework or mechanism for both asylum and full integration into local communities, which, as stated by Fabio Varoli (2010, p. 44), arose due to refugees and asylum seekers tending to settle in cities. Like the U.S. sanctuary city movement's perspective on the city's role in welcoming and assisting precarious migrants, Cities of Solidarity allows for the municipalities to gain a new way of thinking, where new opportunities and ways to protect migrants can be explored and hence also utilised. In addition, it not only focuses on short-term solutions but also creates a broader span of connections between public social programmes and the municipality's efforts to have multiple aspects of a community work together to help integrate and welcome newcomers to the community. Barichello (2016) describes the programme as a novel and positive approach, given the strategies that it outlines for establishing new partnerships between local governments and civil society actors and fostering participation from and interaction between top-down and bottom-up initiatives. In addition, it addresses the influence of gender and the intersectional experience that migration and persecution can take by how conflicts of forced displacement disproportionately impact minority groups, women, and children (UNHCR, 2007, p. 15).

9.5.2 Solidarity and Responsibility-Sharing of the MPA in Later Policies

The MPA employs solidarity and responsibility-sharing, which can be argued to be reflected in the 2011 Migratory Act (*Ley de Migración*). This Act expresses intentions of reaching equality and securing rights of all migrants; it breaks down the segregation between internal and international migrants, and addresses problems of, for instance, misinformation or unwillingness to provide services to migrants in need. Additionally, the inclusion of migration on the political agenda is further seen in connection with the Constitution of Mexico City from 2017, which emphasises the positive aspects of migration and migrants' presence in the city (Faret, 2021, p. 190) and which can be said to follow the ideas of inclusion as presented in the MPA and its Cities of Solidarity programme.

Furthermore, additional factors relate to migration policies of both Mexico as a country and Mexico City at the urban level. That Mexico as a country is simultaneously a sender, a place of transit, and a receiver of migrants produces various issues, including a lack of resources to facilitate the integration and resettlement of migrants arriving in Mexico. The reluctance for migrants to view Mexico as a country of destination is explained by Lorena Cano Padilla (L. C. Padilla, interview, 2023) as

being based on negative similarities to the migrants' countries of origin. This reluctance results in recurring attempts at crossing the border and a collision between migrants and Mexican authorities trying to block them from the border—whether it be at either of the country's borders or within Mexico. When viewing the treatment of migrants, in the context of the aspirations that were proposed in 2004 with the MPA, a number of contradictions are present, with the lack of assistance, deportations, and discrimination being just a few. This has been influenced by many factors, among them external pressure from the United States. This fostered a change in President López Obrador's migratory policy approach resulting in an enhanced focus on apprehension, detentions, and deportation (Leutert, 2020). Furthermore, the treatment of migrants when apprehended and placed in detention centres also reflects a system that is keeping them vulnerable by denying access to lawyers and prolonging the time for NGOs and pro bono lawyers to gain access to aid the migrants, leaving them with no defence (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, March 23, 2023).

The emphasis for additional efforts needed in the protection of precarious migrants in Mexico is further visible through implemented policies and applied approaches in the context of immigration. Hence, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's change from what is described by Stephanie Leutert (2020) as a humanitarian approach to migration towards a primarily enforcement-based strategy contradicts the aspirations of the MPA. Whereas the MPA sets out to 'develop policies and pragmatic solutions to provide effective protection to those who need it', the shift to an enforcement-based strategy resulted in Mexico increasing its number of detentions and deportations (Leutert, 2020, p. xv). This is a strong contrast to the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action describing humanism and solidarity as fundamental principles that should be guiding factors for state policies—including recognition of the *jus cogens* principle of non-refoulement. This principle includes non-rejection at the borders to guarantee protection for those fleeing persecution and violence. It also contradicts the deportation taking place and the assistance provided by the Mexican government to the United States in the form of blocking migrants from reaching the Mexican-U.S. border through the use of checkpoints, the 2019 creation of the National Guard Law (*Ley de la Guardia Nacional*), and other measures.

The shift in strategy by the Mexican government is something Leutert (2020) says has impacted state and local governments, civil society organisations, Mexican citizens, and migrants whether they are waiting in or in transit through the country. It also further highlights the need for sanctuary efforts at the urban scale—not only fighting against migrants' deportation but also creating spaces of solidarity, responsibility-sharing across various fields, and a public focus on protection and care for vulnerable migrants and their safety. The emphasis on shared responsibility throughout society is an aspect of the MPA that resonates with the idea of the sanctuary city.

9.5.3 *Migrant Protection in Mexico City*

Throughout its history, Mexico City, home to over 20 million residents, has been a magnet for both internal and foreign migrants, with the city often becoming a temporary refuge for those fearing the risks of continuing their journey or returning home. Creating a secure urban environment requires cities to define their stance on urban belonging and access to services. Municipalities' responses to migration carry substantial consequences, demanding inclusive approaches to minimise vulnerabilities and disparities among migrants, and granting the migrants a 'right to the city' as described by Purcell (2006). The concept of a sanctuary city extends beyond protection from deportation to encompass collaborative efforts among community, NGOs, and social movements to rebuild lives and communities.

Despite the challenges of fully protecting migrants, the sanctuary promise commits to policy measures that counter deportation and segregation. However, urban inequality persists due to unequal distribution of resources and services. Urban spaces have the capacity and potential to become spaces of formal belonging, distinct from the nation-state. This capacity is restricted in the context of Mexico City, as federal control over migration and asylum matters limits local decision-making, emphasising the need to work towards the prioritisation of sanctuary efforts for migrant protection in the city—to separate the local decision-making from the federal control over migration. Still, the sanctuary city is viewed by Raúl Delgado Wise as an approach that counters right-wing narratives that scapegoat migrants for societal problems for which they are not responsible (Personal Communication, 2023).

9.5.4 *Discrimination in Mexico and Mexico City*

Issues regarding mistreatment of refugees, migrants, and other displaced individuals are complex and visible throughout society. Firstly, a rise in crime has become a significant influence on the lives of migrants in Mexico, with crime having infiltrated authorities in the form of corruption, exposing migrants to an even further vulnerable situation (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). The corruption of authorities is tied to gangs and organised crime, creating a dangerous and insecure society, adding to the fear of and distrust in authorities among migrants (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 12). Secondly, there is crime in detention centres, where authorities destroy migrants' documents in addition to intentionally not informing detained migrants of their rights and preventing contact with lawyers (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). This situation leaves migrants in an extremely vulnerable position and makes it easier for authorities to cover up mistreatment of migrants by transporting them to the southern border before they can receive aid from NGOs, which require at least 5 months to obtain access to detention centres (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). Thirdly, the circle of discrimination is visible in the context of health services, where receiving

assistance from public health centres without immigration documents is difficult and most likely rejected (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023).

This situation contradicts the Migratory Act of 2011, which states that all migrants regardless of their migratory status should have the right to access and receive basic services, including healthcare, and that there should be equality in this regard between Mexican nationals and foreign migrants (Senado de la República, 2011, p. 8). Fourthly, there is a lack of information about the change in immigration policies and required documents for immigration and asylum (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023). Lastly, gender violence is something that IMUMI describes as a severe issue affecting migrant women throughout society, whether it be on the street, in detention centres, or contact with authorities. The examples of continued discrimination against migrants indicates a system that does not wish for them to succeed.

9.5.5 *Mexico, a Dangerous Country to Be a Woman in*

The experience of women in Mexico, whether migrants or nationals, is one heavily affected by violence, uncertainty, and a system denying their lived experiences with sexual and gender-based violence. As a country Mexico is seeing a rise in incidents of violence against women and femicides, exceeding the world average and described as a growing public health and human rights crisis (Avellaneda & Torres, 2023). This behaviour has deep roots in, for instance, *machismo*, *familismo*, and traditional views on gender roles permeating society that allow for the structural violence to persist, making progress difficult and keeping women in an inferior and vulnerable position. While these factors do not alone account for or explain the many cases of gender-based violence, they contribute significantly to the vulnerability faced by women in Mexico.

In 2022, Reuters mentioned a study that estimated an average of ten women were killed daily and tens of thousands were missing throughout the country (Morland & Pelaez-Fernandez, 2022). These numbers emphasise the urgency of battling the outcome of factors contributing to gender-based violence, indicating their visibility and impact throughout society and influencing the perspectives and actions of the government, law enforcement, cartels, and the civilian population. An additional obstacle in the fight against gender-based violence has been the attitude of the country's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. During his tenure from 2018 to 2024, he dismissed the severity of the discrimination, violence, and femicides, suggesting budget cuts for women's shelters and a 75% reduction in support for the federal women's institute (Agren, 2020). These actions indicate a lack of government engagement and protection, placing additional pressure on organisations such as IMUMI to protect women from their abusers. Having a national head of government who, as described by Wendy Figueroa, network director at the National Network of Shelters, 'doubts the word of women in situations of violence' intensifies the vulnerability of women's position in society (Agren, 2020). Hence, with IMUMI

describing Mexico as a dangerous country for women, the vulnerable position of migrant women—whether in transit within the country or transnationally—can place them at higher risks of gender-based violence, with dynamics of migration making it harder for the women to seek help or feel secure in trusting authorities. This is especially the case for non-status migrants (IOM UN Migration, [n.d.](#); L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, [2023](#)).

9.5.6 The Sanctuary City and a Safe Haven for Migrant Women

Given the issues facing migrant protection and the persistent violence against women, Mexico City's sanctuary declaration offered the potential to separate itself from where the national government's efforts are lacking and make it safer for migrant woman to seek help from authorities when falling victims to a crime, no matter who the attacker is. By implementing protective measures and insuring inclusivity in shaping policies through, for example, gender mainstreaming and the systematic incorporation of gender issues throughout all policies and governmental institutions.

Furthermore, the Mexican government's inattention to protecting migrants and women calls for action by the urban community, the community of service providers, NGOs, and the general public (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, [2023](#)). However, interviews with IMUMI and a research dialogue with Delgado Wise highlighted that Mexico City's sanctuary declaration has not resulted in significant changes. This was also noted by Jorge Morales Cardiel ([2022](#)), who argues that sanctuary and solidarity towards migrants and refugees is still nascent in Mexico and took decades to build in other parts of the world.

Nonetheless, the concept of a sanctuary city, with its pledge to safeguard society's most vulnerable members even if this contradicts federal law, presents opportunities for enhancement. Although this can seem utopian and challenging to carry out in practice (Drejer-Jensen, [2023](#)), 'without a vision of a Utopia, there is no way to define that port to which we might want to enter' (David Harvey in Bauder, [2016](#), p. 254). Thus, it becomes imperative to merge current circumstances with the essential prerequisites for future transformation, thus the continuous process of creating lasting societal changes can be perceived as an interplay between existing challenges and aspirations for the future.

9.6 Conclusion

The chapter has explored the implemented policies and their success regarding migrant protection and cultural factors related to the severity of gender-based violence and femicides that women in Mexico face, with a special focus on migrant

women, Mexico City, and its declaration as a sanctuary city. On the national level, Mexico is faced with a crisis stemming from trafficking, torture, disappearances, femicide, censorship, corruption, and a string of human rights violations that, as argued by Alejandro Anaya-Muñoz and Babara Frey (2019), also has a silent, invisible aspect as these offenses specifically target women. While there have been efforts to offer additional protection for women through policies such as the General Law on Women's Right to a Life Free of Violence (2007) and the categorisation of women as a 'vulnerable population', the violence persists. Policies to protect migrants' human rights have also been introduced, at both the municipal and international levels, such as the Political Constitution of Mexico City (2017) and the Protocol for Emergency Humanitarian Attention to Migrants and/or Persons Subject to International Protection (2019), which aims to create guidelines for municipal governments on how to protect the rights of migrants within their cities. The General Law on Population (2008) and the Migratory Act (2011) have also focused on migrant protection at the national level (Drejer-Jensen, 2023). Still, these intentions do not match the documented human rights violations committed by authorities, e.g. in detention centres or regarding deportations taking place throughout the country (Leutert, 2020, p. 41). This contradiction is also reflected in the lack of protections for women as a raft of data and testimonials describe high levels of sexual assault, harassment, femicides, and gender-based violence.

While the national government's acknowledgement of these issues is an important step in creating long-lasting change, this falls short of taking full accountability and implementation of corresponding change. With aspects of gender inequality deeply rooted throughout society, the precarious situation of migrant women is intertwined into Mexican society to a point where it requires action to be taken at both the national and municipal levels. Therefore, the opportunity for cities such as Mexico City to take a stand against the mistreatment and discrimination of migrants—within a framework fitting the challenges and opportunities of the given city—is needed to push the national government to ensure the protection of migrants. When looking at the sanctuary city approach and aspirations of the Mexico City government, Raúl Delgado Wise primarily sees the declaration as a formal act following the city's 2017 political constitution (Delgado Wise, research dialogue 2023). This perspective is supported throughout the interviews, where the declaration was mentioned as either being in the embryonic stages or not having had much of an influence with migrants still being in a vulnerable position in the city. It further became apparent from the interview with IMUMI and Carolina Carreño Nigenda that a hindering factor in the improvement of Mexico City's migrant policies is the subordinate role of municipal policies to national policies. This situation hampers Mexico City's progress and does not enable local policies to respond to city-particular factors.

A research gap remains on the gendered aspects and dimensions of sanctuary policies. While feminist perspectives are central for municipalist platforms with ambitions of 'feminising politics' (a central aim for both Barcelona en Comú and the Fearless Cities Network broadly; see Barcelona en Comú, 2019; Agustín & Jørgensen, Chap. 11, volume 1). More research is needed in analysing how gender

issues are situated in sanctuary frameworks in both the Global South and Global North to combat the vulnerable situation women occupy due to high numbers of gender-based violence incidents and toxic views on gender roles perceiving women as inferior to men. Based on our previous research, we can carve out some similarities and differences in the approaches pursued in Mexico City and Toronto. The comparison with a focus on the respectively FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto and IMUMI in Mexico City (Drejer-Jensen, 2023) revealed similarities in the obstacles faced by both organisations. While the cities have different prerequisites, resources, and approaches to sanctuary efforts, both had issues with contradicting policies and misinformation among service providers, resulting in further difficulties for the work of NGOs. The interviews conducted with both organisations highlighted the extent of dependency to which a city's sanctuary city efforts, declarations, and policies have on collaboration between different actors from various parts of society to succeed. Hence, no matter if a city applies a more openly-committed approach to migrant protection, like Toronto, or a more passive approach, like Mexico City, creating progress and a safe society for migrants takes more than government efforts: it also involves the general public and non-governmental organisations, not only to coordinate activities and allow for necessary considerations to be taken, but also to keep the authorities accountable.

Furthermore, with respect to Teresa Rees's (1998) three ideal typical approaches to gender issues in policy, it can be argued that in the case of Mexico City, the policy approaches of equal treatment and positive action no longer suffice due to the severe gender inequality, violence against women, and femicides that Mexico records. As the violence and discrimination taking place leaves women in such vulnerable and life-threatening situations, urgent and drastic changes need to be made. This situation calls for a systemic incorporation of gender perspectives throughout all policies and government institutions through gender mainstreaming to ensure that women are being protected throughout society and that the established policies aimed to protect them are implemented. This is especially important for migrant women, who are already in a vulnerable and precarious situation where factors such as trauma and fear of deportation add to their difficulties and can minimise the chances of them seeking help from authorities even when victims of gender-based violence. In the current reality, authorities have been known to dismiss victimised women, reflecting a society where the opinions and safety of women are valued as less than that of men (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, interview, 2023; Drejer-Jensen, 2023).

This chapter's analysis of the changing, exclusionary, and discriminatory national migration policies sustained by the Mexican government emphasises the opportunity for urban areas to challenge such these practices and provide social protection, residency, and inclusion for precarious migrants.

Acknowledgments The research conducted for this chapter is based on the MA Thesis work by the first author in the spring of 2023 (Drejer-Jensen, 2023).

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Part III
Policies, Politics, and Rights of Urban
Solidarity

Chapter 10

Istanbul, a Solidarity City? Solidarity Practices and Policies of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality



Mert Pekşen and Erhan Kurtarır

10.1 Introduction

Istanbul is a migrant city. Officially an estimated 529,000 migrants with residence permits (PMM, 2025a) and some 470,000 Syrian refugees under temporary protection (PMM, 2025b) live in the city. They make up about 7% of the city's official population. In addition to the officially registered refugee population, according to research conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at least 430,000 Syrian refugees live in Istanbul without a registration (IOM, 2019). Moreover, Turkey's refugee reception policies impose stringent restrictions to registration options for international protection recipients. The registration system for Syrian refugees under temporary protection and conditional protection for non-Syrian refugees allows them to access public services only in the provinces where they are registered (Pekşen, 2023). According to the instructions of the Ministry of Interior, the province of Istanbul no longer accepts new registrations of Syrian refugees. Non-Syrian refugees who are under conditional protection, due to the mandatory dispersal policy (the so-called satellite city system), are not permitted to register and reside in Istanbul. Regardless of these restrictions, a high number of non-Syrian refugees, who are legally obliged to reside in other provinces, move to Istanbul for better living conditions and access to the labour market thereby giving up their international protection status in the province of registration (Karadağ, 2021). Istanbul remains an attractive option for migrants and refugees, and they continue to move to the city.

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To address the needs of such a large and diverse migrant and refugee population, Istanbul has developed a dynamic urban solidarity structure involving many formal and informal actors with staggeringly different political agendas. These actors include the UNHCR, the IOM, district municipalities, local and national NGOs, and solidarity networks that contribute to the urban migration governance and aim to improve migrant inclusion and refugee reception. Among these actors, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) plays a key role in shaping the city's capacity for solidarity practices and structures.

In this chapter, we analyse how the IMM, the primary local authority tasked with providing municipal services to city residents, negotiates the limits of inclusion and exclusion of migrants and refugees to public services and how its policies influence the solidarity landscape in the city. We focus on the IMM's Migration Unit, which became the Directorate for Migration and Social Cohesion in 2021 and oversaw the coordination and implementation of the IMM's migration policies. Our chapter illustrates how Turkey's centralised administrative system and top-down refugee governance policies create a considerable limitation to the alternative legal constructions of urban inclusion mechanisms by the IMM. Exclusion of migrants and refugees from local services due to political polarisation, however, coexists with their invisible inclusion into support and solidarity structures at the urban scale. Furthermore, due to legal and administrative limitations, the notion of solidarity city remains mainly at the discursive level as a vision for an inclusive city. The IMM does not show any explicit commitment to sanctuary policies and carefully avoids the questions of legal and formal forms of inclusion. Relatedly, while the municipality shows interest in establishing a more inclusive agenda, Turkey's highly polarised political atmosphere and the hierarchical refugee governance structure shape the abilities of the IMM and force it to establish a strategic invisibility. To avoid potential political conflicts and to protect the municipality from political criticism, the IMM avoids labels and refrains from publicising its work.

Especially after the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011, the scholarship on Turkey's migration governance and refugee reception policies has covered a wide range. Scholars examined the temporariness and legal aspects of reception (İlcan et al., 2018; Rygiel et al., 2016), living conditions of urban refugees (Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016), civil society organisations' engagement in refugee reception (Boşnak, 2021; Dimitrova & Ozdora Aksak, 2021; Sunata & Tosun, 2019), and activist groups and refugee self-organisations that create structures of solidarity at the urban scale (Genç, 2017; Sahin Mencutek, 2021). Many studies on refugee reception and migrant inclusion focus on national scale processes. Still, municipalities in Turkey—among key actors in the urban infrastructure of refugee reception and migration governance—have also received attention after the arrival of Syrian refugees. Most of the studies on district and city municipalities in Turkey have focused almost exclusively on refugee reception and hospitality (Alvanoğlu & Ateş, 2020; Balcıoğlu, 2020; Betts et al., 2021; Çevik, 2021; Coşkun & Uçar, 2019; Danış & Nazlı, 2019; Polat & Lowndes, 2022; Yavçan & Memişoğlu, 2023). This narrow focus was perhaps understandable in the context of ongoing Syrian refugee arrivals. Over the years, however, the situation has changed significantly as Turkey's urban

refugee population settled long-term and non-citizen groups in cities diversified even more. Increasing numbers created pressure on metropolitan and district municipalities lacking capacity. Not all municipalities approached the migrant inclusion and refugee reception from an inclusive perspective, but the necessity of establishing a local migration policy has become an item in the political agenda of many municipalities (Koca et al., 2017; Erdoğan, 2017). Municipalities established their own ad hoc local responses, policies, methods and tools which did not follow a unified script, even contradicting one another. Building on such scholarly analysis of the municipal policies and practices in Turkey, this chapter contributes to the literature by analysing the IMM's policies and practices for all migrants and refugees, whether registered refugees, residence permit holders, or illegalised migrants. The chapter also aims to move the analysis away from the narrow focus on refugee reception that is present in the current literature on Istanbul—and Turkey in general.

Empirical data analysed in this chapter is drawn from three main sources. The first is desk research of the academic and grey literature of the IMM's policies on migration inclusion and refugee support. We examined policy statements, strategy, and action plans published by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality with a specific focus on two themes: the process of developing solidarity practices and policies in the city that address the needs of all migrant and refugee groups; and the IMM's perceptions and representations of its own engagement with migrant and refugee groups. Such an analysis not only provided us with an overview of the main institutional landscape of solidarity established by the IMM but allowed us to contrast it with the interviews that provided more detail about the everyday negotiation and implementation of the IMM's vision and policies on the ground. Second, in July and August 2023, we conducted two in-depth expert interviews with the former (2021–2023) (Interview #1) and then the current (2023–) (Interview #2) coordinators of the Directorate for Migration and Integration Policy (formerly the Migration Unit) to gain better insight into the IMM's response to refugees and migrants, its vision for the future, and its limitations. We coded the interviews thematically and identified the overlaps and changes over time, particularly regarding the IMM's efforts to establish structures within the highly polarised political context and how the municipality understands its limits and potential in implementing more inclusive frameworks. Both interviews were conducted in Turkish. All excerpts from the texts and interviews were translated into English by us. Third, Erhan Kurtarıcı has served as an advisory board member to the Migration Unit since its foundation in 2019 thereby closely following the establishment process. His insights into the particularities of this process and the internal workings of the Unit complemented the data we collected through document analysis and interviews.

In the next section, we briefly situate the case of Istanbul within the literature on solidarity cities. We then provide a brief background on Turkey's local administration system, highlighting the limitations that municipalities face in implementing migration policies and practices at the urban scale. Next, we focus on the institutionalisation of the IMM's Migration Directorate and its inclusive urban politics, analysing how the IMM envisions an inclusive future for the city, navigates the polarised and hierarchical political context, and negotiates the boundaries of

inclusion and exclusion at the urban scale. We conclude with a discussion on the factors shaping the IMM's abilities for structuring more inclusive city politics and briefly reflect on the applicability of the concept of solidarity city in this case.

10.2 Literature Review

The literature on local and urban regimes of migrant inclusion and refugee reception and on solidarity and sanctuary cities highlights a productive tension between local authorities such as municipalities or counties, and the national/federal governments that often (claim to) have a plenary power over immigration issues. Urban policies of solidarity and sanctuary challenge national level practices and policies on migration, refugee reception, and the nature of political and social membership categories (Bauder, 2017). Legal and social belongings and memberships are configured at the urban scale. Local authorities such as municipalities or city governments find creative and inclusive solutions within, and sometimes beyond, their legislative and administrative competence to legalise the presence of unauthorised migrants and asylum seekers, to protect them from deportation and detention practices of national governments, or to implement other policies creating a more inclusive and safer urban environment (Darling & Bauder, 2019; Bauder, 2017; de Graauw, 2014; Varsanyi, 2006).

The most studied cases of solidarity and sanctuary constructions at the local scale have been the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Further theorisation attempts were made focusing on other geographical contexts (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019a, b; Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018, Stefoni et al., Chap. 1, this volume; Jerena-Montiel et al., 2025, Chap. 8, volume 1; Koskimaki & Pazani, Chap. 4, this volume; Setrana et al., 2025, Chap. 9, volume 1). In contrast to geographical contexts where municipal authorities possess a degree of autonomy in migration issues like in federal countries such as the United States or Canada, municipal authorities in Turkey do not have any legislative and administrative competence to create their own migration policy or to design their own formal inclusive frameworks.

In one of the very few studies directly discussing the concept of sanctuary city in the Turkish case, Gülçin Balamir Coşkun and Aslı Yılmaz Uçar (2019) scrutinise whether district municipalities in Istanbul use sanctuary city policies and practices and highlight certain peculiarities of the Turkish case. This chapter builds on their analysis, extending it and broadening the focus from district municipalities to the IMM and highlighting the contingency of these concepts on geographical and political contexts.

Due to its hierarchical administrative structure, polarised political context, underdeveloped institutional capacity, and an unprecedented number of arrivals in a short period of time, Istanbul provides a significant case to question the limits of (institutional) solidarity regimes at the urban scale, in which the scale of the city plays a significant role in shaping formalised solidarity relations (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2021). By focusing explicitly on Istanbul, together with other

contributions in this edited book, we discuss the applicability of the solidarity city and related concepts such as sanctuary city and urban citizenship regimes (Bauböck, 2003, 2019; Varsanyi, 2006) in a novel geographic context.

10.3 The Case of Turkey

Turkey is a highly centralised state with a two-tier administration system at the local scale. The country is divided into 81 provinces, which are the main administrative units headed by governors who are appointed by the central authority. Provincial governorships, under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior, act as the main regulatory authority at the local level and do not possess any legislative competence to introduce new policies without the direct supervision of the central government. Parallel to this administrative structure, city municipalities are governed by elected mayors. Municipalities are the key local public administration institutions that provide services such as water, sanitation, and transportation but not police, education, or healthcare which are provided by the provincial governments under the supervision of the central government.

In terms of the organisation of migration governance at the provincial level, the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) is the responsible body operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. Provincial branches of the PMM evaluate asylum applications, issue resident permits, operate removal centres, and implement and enforce migration policies at the provincial scale. The current migration and asylum legislation does not give municipalities any legislative authority to introduce their own policies and does not even impose a formal institutional responsibility to include non-citizens in their public services (Demiroglu, 2021, p. 973). Article 96 of Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) includes only a minor mention on the role of municipalities, indicating that they can only contribute to the work carried out under the coordination of the PMM (Bostancı & Durmaz, 2021; Çevik, 2021).

As other studies have highlighted (e.g. Çevik, 2021; Erdoğan, 2017), some municipalities try to eliminate the legal ambiguity of their activities for refugees and migrants by framing their activities in relation to the Article No. 13 of Law No. 5393 on Municipalities which states that ‘every person is a fellow citizen of the town where he/she resides, has the right to participate in decision making processes, and has rights to access services provided by local municipalities’. Similarly, some activist groups in Istanbul established their networks exactly on this principle and formulated their social inclusion framework as an urban one. For instance, *Mülteciyim Hemşerim!* (Refugee, We are, Neighbours!), a local solidarity network in Istanbul (active until around 2018) established long-lasting relations with two neighbourhood organisations on the outskirts of Istanbul. While trying to build a neighbourhood-based membership among residents and refugees, it also pushed the local municipalities and other authorities to take part. They based their legal argument on a document regulating municipal-level relations instead of national-level

immigration legislation and framed their efforts to include refugees, regardless of their registration status, as an example of a politics of presence (Darling, 2014, 2017). In the case of municipalities, while an argumentation based on Article 13 allows municipalities to include non-citizens in their service infrastructures, it has strong limitations in practice because Article No. 14 of the same law explicitly states that municipal services shall be provided to *citizens*.

In addition, municipalities in Turkey lack the financial means to design and provide services for non-residents of the city (Coşkun & Uçar, 2019; Demiroğlu, 2021; Memişoğlu & Yavçan, 2022; Koca et al., 2017). Law No. 5779 specifies that ‘allocations from the central administration to local governments are calculated on the basis of the population (referring only to citizens) and the scale of the municipal territories’ (Coşkun & Uçar, 2019, p. 112). This way of allocating the budget significantly limits the scope of municipalities’ activities, even if they are willing to create a more inclusive urban agenda for migrants and refugees. As a way to finance their activities, many municipalities ‘seek external funding either through setting up their own NGOs or establishing partnerships with NGOs and international actors, thereby overcoming legal obscurities’ (Memişoğlu & Yavçan, 2022, p. 513; see Daniş & Nazlı 2019 for the case of Sultanbeyli District Municipality which excelled in this practice). Additionally, expenditures for non-citizens become a potential concern for municipalities when their budgets undergo annual audits by the Court of Accounts (*Sayıştay*, in Turkish), which deters municipalities to a certain extent from engaging in more inclusive migration politics. But as shown in the next section, municipalities also push their activities into a more invisible area to blend with existing services that are already offered to all residents of the city.

10.4 Institutionalisation of Solidarity by the IMM

The 2019 local elections in Istanbul marked the beginning of major changes. Since 1994, the ruling party AKP and its predecessors had governed the IMM. Until the election of the new mayor from the main opposition party CHP in 2019, the IMM had no institutionally defined migration policy and did not take a proactive approach on migrant and refugee inclusion (Memişoğlu & Yavçan, 2022, p. 513). Since the IMM and the central government were led by the same party, the previous IMM administrations did not go beyond the municipal jurisdiction of LFIP.

Institutionally the IMM set a new vision after 2019 and committed to a more inclusive, transparent, and democratic administration. This approach was also reflected in the area of migration, with the municipality’s new vision emphasising that there is a place for migrants and refugees within an inclusive municipality approach. One of the key figures of the new administration, Şengül Altan Arslan who is the former Deputy Secretary General of the IMM (2019–2022), makes a direct connection between the IMM’s changing migration policy and the establishment of the Migration Unit, which has an inclusive and human-centred service provision policy. The ‘Just City’ and ‘Human Rights City for All’ perspectives, which

are explicitly mentioned in the Strategy Plan 2020–2024, have supported the migration policy and services:

Our work for migrants is based on the premise that Istanbul is a just city of human rights. We believe in the right of everyone who live in this city, especially vulnerable groups, to benefit from city services. (Altay, 2021)

Reflecting the change in IMM’s stance regarding urban migration politics, the municipality decided to have a unit for migration and social cohesion. Its brief history of around 5 years shows clearly how the IMM’s position, abilities, and strategies shifted. IMM’s Migration Unit started its journey under the Directorate of Social Services in 2019, then became independent as the Directorate for Migration and Social Cohesion in 2021, but could not complete the formal establishment process due to political reasons and in mid-2013 was downgraded to a unit of the Office of Migration and Social Cohesion, again under the Directorate of Social Services.

Table 10.1 summarises roughly the phases of the migration unit’s establishment and the triggering support mechanisms for these processes. In the inclusive policy development phase, after the 2019 local elections, the IMM set up its Migration Unit and started to outline its own migration and cohesion policy with the help of the new vision defined by the IMM’s 2020–2024 Strategic Plan, which was the first support basis for inclusive policies and services. The topic of migration and refugees has been identified as one of the three critical problems of Istanbul by the

Table 10.1 IMM’s migration unit development process

Time Period	Phases	Institutional Unit Name and Status	Main responsibility	Main Supporting Mechanisms and Documents
Before 2019	Lack of inclusive policy	No unit	No direct responsibility. Only supports the work of the Directorate of Migration Management.	Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)
2019–2021	Inclusive policy development	Migration unit	Development of IMM’s Migration Policy Framework; Preparation of IMM Migration and Social Cohesion Action Plan (2020–2024)	IMM 2020–2024 Strategic Plan. UNHCR support for the establishment of the migration unit
2021–2023	Inclusive policy implementation	Directorate for Migration and Social Cohesion	Implementation of the Action Plan on Migration and Social Cohesion (2020–2024)	IMM 2020–2024 Strategic Plan, IMM 2021–2024 Local Equality Action Plan (LEAP)
Since 2023	Strategic invisibility	Office of Migration and Social Cohesion Policy	Provides invisible support for ongoing project and services	National and local election agendas and shifting discourses created a policy of invisibility in immigrant support services.

participants of the Strategic Plan survey and workshops. Thereafter, the IMM began preparations for establishing a migration unit and held several local coordination meetings in 2020 to draft a local action plan. The municipality recognised its own limited capacity and initiated infrastructure development, fundraising, and capacity-building activities (Interview #2).

The Migration Unit first forged relationships with local, national, and international organisations to understand migration in Istanbul and to learn from the experience of peer institutions (Bostancı & Durmaz, 2021). UNHCR has been an essential partner in the process. During the second phase, the IMM developed its own action plans for migration, social cohesion, and local equality. The official establishment of the Directorate for Migration and Social Cohesion Policy was approved by the City Council in September 2021. However, in 2022 and 2023 migration policies and practices have been heavily affected by the exclusionary discourses that became the subject of both local and national politics in the context of the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. Since then, as discussed below, the IMM administration has chosen to be strategically invisible to protect itself from political criticism and not to risk re-election in the March 2024 local elections, in which the incumbent mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, remained in office with 51% of the vote. Comparing the situation before the election, we have not observed any major changes in the policies and the stance of the municipality.

10.4.1 Vision for an Inclusive City

With the outlining of the 2020–2024 Strategy Plan (IMM, 2020) and the Local Equality Action Plan (IMM, 2021) by the new municipal administration, the principles of a just city and inclusiveness have become central pillars of the municipality's vision. Both in the Strategy Plan and in the Migration and Social Cohesion Strategy Document and Action Plan (2020–2024), the IMM initiated a proactive stance towards migrant inclusion and refugee reception in the city. The Strategy Document and Action Plan was drafted but never published officially by the municipality (we obtained a copy from the Migration Unit; for a brief summary, see Bostancı, n.d.). The municipality had never been sufficiently involved in the field of migration in the past and lacked the institutional capacity and vision for an inclusive city. With the change in administration, it shifted from no policy to proactive solidarity and inclusive city practices. According to the new inclusive discourse, the IMM strived to fulfil the goal of seeing all residents of the city as equal and providing services to all in need regardless of their legal status:

In line with ‘Sharing Istanbul’, one of the core values of the IMM Strategic Plan, we have taken action to produce data-driven policies on migration, which we see as one of the most important urban issues of the city... We ensure that local people benefit equally from all our work including migrants. Through vocational training, language training, daycare support, protection services, entrepreneurship consultancy, cooperatives and employment support,

we strive to create self-sufficient individuals who contribute positively to the city's society.
(Interview #2)

To create a more inclusive city politics, the Directorate has aimed to increase coordination among the district municipalities and establish inter-municipal cooperation for good governance; support the service capacity of all municipalities in the city; ensure data flow in the area of migration to enable data-driven policymaking and inclusive service delivery; and ensure human rights and gender equality to promote social cohesion in the city. This inclusive vision resulted in multiple new services and existing municipal services being made accessible to migrants and refugees:

The aim is not to provide services for migrants and refugees from a single point, but to improve the capacity of services already provided within the municipality to include migrants and refugees in the city. (Interview #2)

As the first institutional attempt to establish the local migration service management model for Istanbul, the Directorate has positively influenced other actors. In addition to having direct influence on the vision of the IMM and on its strategic plan documents and activity reports, the Directorate provided trainings in inclusive municipalities and had an overarching impact on other departments of the municipality (Interview #1). As the current coordinator evaluates the achievements of the Directorate:

The Directorate has been involved in the migration governance process within the IMM, has influenced the strategy plans, regulations, contracts, agreements and inter-institutional consensus texts prepared as much as possible since its establishment, and has ensured that these texts are prepared in an inclusive language that does not exclude migrants.
(Interview #2)

More specifically, the Unit—and later, Directorate—has mobilised different departments of the IMM to offer multilingual services, especially in the Municipal 153 Call Centre and interpreter support in relevant service areas; establish a hotline with simultaneous language translation for migrants and refugees for the use of IMM and district municipalities; create mobile service teams increasing migrants' access to municipal services; make health counselling centre services for migrants more accessible; support migrant entrepreneurship; and create new places and events of encounter between migrants and host community of the city such as the Neighbourhood Houses (Interview #2).

While the IMM's policy papers and the strategic plans had an inclusive vision for the future, these documents framed asylum seekers and refugees as a challenge for the city that needs to be resolved. These documents never mention the rising numbers of illegalised migrants and refugees who are also current residents of the city. The city's 2050 Vision document (IMM, 2022a), which was announced in July 2022, surprisingly almost completely avoided the issue of migrant inclusion and refugee support (Interview #1). In the 2050 Vision, migration and asylum are thematised only very briefly in relation to labour market integration (p. 28), cultural diversity (pp. 243–244), and climate justice (p. 102). This mismatch between discourse and practice requires a closer look. The lack of inclusive policies regarding migrants and refugees in more recent documents does not automatically mean that

the IMM, particularly the Directorate for Migration and Cohesion Policy, has been completely absent or has given up on inclusive expansion of services. Rather, we argue, inclusive politics on the urban scale, within the highly polarised political atmosphere of Turkey, require significant negotiations and local actors continuing (or trying to continue) their inclusive activities without labelling them as such.

10.4.2 Navigating the Political Context

Turkey's administrative regime and polarised political context influences the IMM's abilities to create inclusive policies for migrants and refugees. The IMM and the Directorate have primarily navigated three tensions: the rivalry between central and local administrations; the polarised political context of 2024 local elections; and shrinking public support for inclusive politics at the national level.

First, the political rivalry between the IMM and the central government after the 2019 local elections. This rivalry, together with the hierarchical administration system favouring the central over the local level, shape the IMM's abilities. Municipalities and other local authorities constantly negotiate with the national level to be able to include all residents of the city in the urban solidarity structures. While some municipalities in Turkey (e.g. Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, Sultanbeyli District Municipality) have access to political power to establish hospitality infrastructures through their political affiliations with the governing party, many others clash with the central authority. As both former and current coordinators of the Directorate emphasised, the central government and its local branches like the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management refuse to cooperate with the municipality:

While carrying out its work in the field of migration, IMM makes constant efforts to establish communication and coordination, especially with the Provincial Migration Management...we have requested communication with the central government at every stage...their reluctance to do so makes this communication impossible. (Interview #2)

The municipality's different political party affiliation is a direct exclusionary factor, which prevents the establishment of a holistic migrant inclusion and refugee reception policy for the city. For instance, the IMM has not been invited to the Istanbul migration coordination meetings organised by the Provincial Governorship (Interview #1). Furthermore, the central government does not share data on city's migrant and refugee populations with the municipality, hindering the IMM's planning and implementation of inclusive migration services. As highlighted by the former coordinator of the Directorate, the IMM does not exactly know the number or socio-economic profile of the city's non-citizen residents as all registrations are going through the central government (Interview #1). The lack of a municipal population register is a central issue limiting the IMM's planning abilities. Also, as Harald Bauder and Dayana Gonzalez (2018, p. 130), argued, the absence of

municipal registries significantly impacts the nature of local policies designed for the needs of (illegalised) migrants and refugees.

To have a more comprehensive picture, the IMM commissioned a study focusing on the Istanbul-wide migration survey (Doğan et al., 2021). This study was complemented with other research (on capacity analysis of district municipalities, interviews with urban refugees, focus group meetings with NGOs and other stakeholders, advisory board meetings) conducted directly by the Directorate to understand the current situation in Istanbul. The results were not publicised but were used for the Directorate's own capacity-building.

Secondly, the national and local election timeline correlates with the IMM's stance towards migrant inclusion. In the optimistic and progressive context of the post-2019 local elections, the IMM did not shy from establishing a department specifically for migration, creating policy and strategy plans and positioning this work in the framework of inclusiveness. This changed in the period preceding the presidential and parliamentary elections of May 2023. The discourse of some political parties openly shifted to opposing refugees and migrants. Most of the mayors omitted pro-refugee references from their speeches; municipalities replaced the terms 'refugee' or 'person under international protection' with 'migrant' in their publications or completely omitted them. The IMM's policy on migrants and refugees has been likewise affected by concerns about securing re-election in the March 2024 local elections. In the context of electoral politics, the municipal administration no longer put a strong emphasis publicly on migrant inclusion. This shift in the discourse had a significant impact on the visibility of the Directorate:

Our visibility as a Directorate decreased, especially as the date of local elections is [was] getting closer, and we have [had] to try to carry out many activities without publicizing them. (Interview #2)

Lastly, and related to the previous point, changing the national discourse towards a strong anti-immigrant and anti-refugee environment affected the municipality's activities in the field of migration. Municipal services for migrants and refugees have moved towards using less visible methods. The Directorate's formal establishment has not been completed, and it was downgraded to the Office for Migration and Social Cohesion Policy operating under the Directorate of Social Services. This reluctance and the shifting political environment affected trust relations with donor organisations and undermined the reliability and image of the municipality's migration policy. For these reasons, some internationally funded migrant support projects could not be continued or new funding for municipal work could not be secured. External stakeholders' confidence in the organisation has suffered due to the negative changes in the country's politics that have also affected IMM's senior management.

Despite the rivalry between the central and local levels, polarised political context, and decreasing public support for inclusive politics, the Directorate continued to implement capacity-building and social cohesion activities in a more invisible way. It established Neighbourhood Houses and Istanbul Family Counselling and Training Centres (ISADEM) in line with the objectives of the Migration and Social

Cohesion Action Plan, began accepting migrant children into the municipal daycare centres, plans to publish an Inclusive City Map (*MahalliMap*) that compiles the urban public services of the IMM and ten district municipalities in Istanbul, and aims to announce the services and activities for migrants in the city to facilitate their access to services (IMM, 2022b).

10.4.3 *Negotiating the Boundaries of Inclusion/Exclusion*

While the national government may define the major parameters of the normative environment of migrant inclusion and refugee reception in Turkey, the city is the key scale where migration is governed in practice and where the boundaries and nature of (urban) membership are being negotiated and drawn. The mere presence in Istanbul of illegalised migrants, unregistered refugee populations, and refugees who lack a residency permit complicates the boundaries of membership and opens a field for negotiation. The city itself becomes one of the key locations where distinctions between inclusion and exclusion and legality and illegality are defined and negotiated.

Drawing on the literature on the city as a place of inclusion and exclusion, (e.g. Bauder, 2012, 2016, 2022; Darling, 2017; Lebuhn, 2022; Varsanyi, 2006), we argue that the IMM's policies have a double nature. On one hand, they draw the boundaries of legal presence by formally providing services only to registered non-citizen residents of the city. As a general rule, if a person has a valid legal residency status in Turkey, they have access to the IMM's services. In most cases, a national ID number for foreigners suffices to register for events and activities provided by the IMM. On the other hand, they negotiate illegalisation and exclusion practices of the central authority and create a more inclusive atmosphere for migrants and refugees in the city. In contrast to a more exclusive and province-dependent construction of the refugee status in Turkey, the IMM bends the boundaries of membership and includes refugees who are not registered in Istanbul to some of their social service provisions. While the central government's residency policy for refugees obliges refugees to reside in the province of registration and ties access to services to their continuing residency in the province (e.g. refugees have access to healthcare and education services only in the province of registration), the IMM disregards this principle in providing some services and expands the boundaries of the valid migrant and refugee status. It provides services to all who have a registration in Turkey:

Without identification, it is not possible to provide assistance (except in extreme cases). Migrants without identity documents cannot be assisted through the IMM system. In order for refugees in Istanbul to be included in the IMM social services system, an identity registration number issued by the Turkish state is required. Exceptions have been made for registered persons living outside Istanbul, such as those who arrived in Istanbul after the earthquake [in southeast Turkey on February 20, 2023]...Urban refugees who wish to benefit from IMM's urban services other than material and cash assistance, but who are registered outside Istanbul, can benefit from these services if they reside in Istanbul. (Interview #2)

Regarding illegalised migrants, however, the IMM has no formal inclusion policy. Migrants gain access to certain services through face-to-face interactions with the front-line municipal staff who do not ask legal status. For example, as the non-registered migrants and refugees are residents of Istanbul, they are referred to other service points established under the leadership of the Migration Unit and can benefit from opportunities such as education, social support, and employment. The IMM uses the municipality's authority to provide services to urban residents to overcome the restrictions in the national legislation and offers self-developed service practices in line with the possibilities provided by the Municipality Law. Additionally, the IMM finds a way to circumvent national legislation and opens up the possibility of including illegalised migrants in social services. In particular, the newly established Neighbourhood Houses (*Mahalle Evleri*) have a policy of not asking the legal status of the person benefiting from the services (Interview #1). Some activities in the Neighbourhood Houses are designed specifically for migrants, indicatively, the Language Courses for Foreigners and Conversation Club for Migrants. Similarly, the IMM's local units, which provide services to disadvantaged families, do not ask for any official registration when an urban refugee family needs support.

10.5 Conclusion

Based on our analysis of the forces that shape the quality and the nature of inclusive city practices of the IMM, we argue that the inclusivity attempts of municipalities need to be strengthened through four axes: (1) institutional infrastructure and capacity, (2) legislative framework, (3) social and community support, and (4) political support.

First, institutional infrastructure and municipal capacity are key factors influencing the degree and the success of migrant inclusion and refugee reception at the urban scale. The IMM, until 2019, had very limited experience and knowledge about the coordination of services for international migrants and undocumented migrants. The municipality had no significant strategic plan regarding migrant inclusion and refugee reception. While the municipality possessed a strong service-providing capacity, resources were not utilised in an inclusive way. The municipality began engaging with the issues of international migrants and improving its coordination capacity to overcome city-specific migration-related issues after the local elections in June 2019 and the immediate establishment of the Migration Unit. Between 2019 and 2023, the IMM was able to mobilise different municipal departments and establish cooperations with other urban actors.

Second, the lack of a comprehensive legal infrastructure that guarantees and authorises municipalities to produce inclusive services for migrants limits the IMM's abilities. While the municipality has no legal competence to govern migration and refugee support at the scale of the city, legal ambiguities and the urgency of the situation provide an opportunity for the municipality to include refugees and migrants in its existing social support and solidarity structures.

Third, public support strongly influences the IMM's stance towards migrant inclusion and refugee reception in the city. In the polarised political context, the IMM's willingness to invest in inclusive migration politics becomes fragile as community support for such policies at the urban scale significantly decreases. Dwindling public support for more inclusive urban migration politics causes the IMM to reduce visible inclusive services, while the municipality maintains services without making the information public. And, finally, the rivalry between the governing party (AKP) and the party of the current mayor (CHP) influences the abilities of the municipality. To protect the opposition party from criticism during the May 2023 national elections and in the March 2024 local elections, the IMM pushed municipal activities in this field into a grey area and made them a relatively invisible sphere of service production. The central government, by choosing not to cooperate with the municipality, limits the IMM's planning and implementation abilities.

Regarding the applicability of solidarity city conceptualisation to the case of Istanbul, we share the observation of scholars who pointed out the distinctness of the Turkish case (Coşkun & Uçar, 2019). As we have argued above, the Turkish migration regime and administrative system do not allow local municipal authorities to create their own migration policy. Municipalities are not allowed to keep city population registries; nor may they allocate budget for activities for migrants or innovate in inclusive categories of urban membership, for instance by establishing local ID cards (de Graauw, 2014). Certainly, the Turkish case cannot be considered equal to cases from North America, where local authorities, despite challenges in practice, possess a certain amount of autonomy to create their own inclusive (or exclusionary) migration policy. The case of Istanbul, and Turkey more broadly, on the other hand, shows us that the central government's provincial branches executing migration policy have more power and resources than the elected municipal authorities. The lack of clearly defined tasks of municipal authorities in the field of migrant inclusion and refugee reception and executive power to implement urban and local migration policy distinguishes the case of Istanbul from other cases from the Global North, whose analysis has largely shaped the literature on solidarity and sanctuary cities.

While civil society organisations and solidarity initiatives find less space for their activities in the current political context, our research shows that the municipality has capacity to provide services in an inclusive way, while protecting itself from the central government. The IMM has pushed an inclusive agenda through strategies such as advertising and implementing an inclusive vision, navigating innovatively the restrictive administrative regime, and stretching the boundaries of inclusion at the urban scale. Whether IMM's solidarity practices can be labelled as solidarity city politics or not, we value the position of the IMM in the broader landscape of solidarity and inclusive city as it is a public institution that negotiates its position within a constrained, fragile, and polarised political context. Including such a perspective in the solidarity city literature that accounts for cities like Istanbul that strive to act in solidarity under circumstances that are severely constrained advances the ongoing debates regarding the meanings and practices of (institutional) solidarity in the contexts outside of the Global North.

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Chapter 11

Politics of Governance or Governance of Politics? Exploring Migrant Policies in the City of Athens



Sofia Ntaliou 

11.1 Introduction

Cities have become strategic sites for migration, offering opportunities and services that attract migrants. Notably, cities are often viewed as more inclusive and accommodating compared to nation-states, particularly since 2015 when Europe witnessed a significant increase in incoming migrants that in turn led to a surge in nationalist sentiments. This ‘local turn’ (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017) has prompted discussions on urban agency in migration. Scholars have developed various paradigms to describe local migrant policies and their governance models, shedding light on the distinctive features and dynamics that shape decision-making processes and outcomes. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge by delving into Athens’s approach to migrant policies, focusing on un(der)documented migrants.

In this study, ‘underdocumented’ migrants (Humphris, 2020) are defined as people ‘who have temporary access to partial documentation, such as work permits, social security numbers, and driver’s licences, but are not granted the same rights as citizens...’ (Terrazas et al., 2020, p. 361). I argue that Athens follows a ‘Pragmatic Guest-resident’ paradigm (Alexander, 2007; Schiller, 2015), shaped by both the national centralised (top-down) governance structure and the city’s distinct local *political will*. Shifts in political leadership at both national and municipal levels have led to fluctuating policies that impact migrant policies.

The study adopts an interpretivist perspective, utilising reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) for data analysis, assisted by the analytical software NVivo. It draws on 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted between May 2022 and July 2023, with key informants, all in Greek. To maintain brevity and readability, abbreviations are used throughout the text when referring to specific

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Table 11.1 List of interviewees

Identifiers	Description	Date
Daskalaki, M.	City Councillor, Special Advisor to the Mayor for migrants and refugees, President at the Council for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees and at the Reception and Solidarity Centre (KYADA) of Athens, former President of the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA)	2022, 05/31
HDSSIMR	Head of the Municipal Department for the Support and Social Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees	2022, 06/03
Expert1	Associate Liaison Expert and Project Coordinator of Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) and Cities Network for Integration (CNI)	2022, 09/08
Papagiannakis, L.	Director of the non-profit organisation Greek Council for Refugees, former Vice Mayor on Migrant and Refugee Affairs	2022, 09/09
ALC	Advocacy and Legal Coordinator of Generation 2.0	2022, 09/10
Expert2	Expert in Migrant Integration	2022, 09/08
GFM	Greek Forum for Migrants	2022, 10/12
EC	Employment Consultant from the SolidarityNow	2022, 12/14
HPEDSSD	Head of Planning, Organisation, & EGovernment municipal Department of the Social Solidarity Directorate	2023, 01/23
OMEKA	Office Manager of the Migrant Office in the Centre of Athens Labor Unions (EKA).	2023, 01/25
Expert3	Project Manager CRS	2023, 07/06
Migemp	Employee of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum	2023, 07/10

Source: Author's own elaboration

interviewees (Table 11.1). For my research interviews I used purposive and snow-ball sampling (Small, 2009; Bryman, 2012, p. 422) aimed at ‘information richness’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 28) and transcribed them orthographically (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The study also used document analysis, including migration legislation and government policies, and migration reports by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of University College Dublin, and I took all necessary steps to ensure confidentiality of participants when needed.¹

The study contributes to the academic literature by providing a nuanced and context-specific understanding of the complexities of local migration governance and policy paradigms, refining Alexander's original models and emphasising the

¹ While most interviewees agreed to participate by name, I opted to use their job titles in most cases to provide clarity and context.

interplay between national and local influences. The analysis underscores the delicate balance between external pressures—including the dynamics of both vertical and horizontal governance—and internal attitudes, revealing how, even within highly centralised states, the local level can demonstrate a degree of autonomy in shaping immigration policies when sufficient ‘political will’ is present. The chapter is structured in four sections: an initial literature review, an examination of the national context, an in-depth exploration of the empirical case, and a concluding section summarising key points, discussing research implications, and proposing actionable suggestions to enhance migrant integration in Athens.

11.2 Literature Review

Whereas the local level was traditionally perceived as subservient to the national administration (Torpey, 2000), catering to the central government interests without autonomy, a recent ‘local turn’ (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017) has gained momentum in politics, acknowledging that cities hold significant influence and importance in migration (Bauböck, 2003; Blank, 2007; Blokland et al., 2015; Holston & Appadurai, 1999; Isin, 1999; Purcell, 2003; Sassen, 2002). This ‘local turn’ is evident in initiatives promoting migrant-friendly policies, like sanctuary cities in the United States and Canada, municipal ID cards in Barcelona, Zurich, and U.S. sanctuary cities, and networks such as EUROCITIES, URBACT, Intercultural Cities, and ECCAR, among others.

Academia similarly reflects this shift, with scholars exploring the role of local governments in migration (Alexander, 2007; Ambrosini & Boccagni, 2015; Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018; Caponio & Borkert, 2010; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Penninx et al., 2004; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017), with some even introducing the concept of ‘local/urban citizenship’ (Bauböck, 2003; Blokland et al., 2015; Gebhardt, 2016; Hase, 2020; Kaufmann, 2019; Lebuhn, 2017; Siemiatycki & Isin, 1997; Spiro, 2010; Villazor, 2009; Woodman, 2016).

This body of literature delves into the characteristics of local agency and the dynamics between national and local levels. It investigates whether the local level has the autonomy and capability to effectively handle migration matters, and whether local-level policies align or diverge from national ones (Flamant, 2020; Hackett, 2017; Jørgensen, 2012; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2013; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008; Schiller, 2015). While some scholars argue that local authorities are more accommodating than the national level, prioritising a practical problem-solving approach to migration matters within their jurisdiction (Barber, 2013; Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Doomernik & Ardon, 2018; Gebhardt, 2015; Jørgensen, 2012; Penninx et al., 2004; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008), others contend that the local level is not inherently more accommodating (Ambrosini, 2013; Hadj-Abdou, 2014). Instead, they argue that local policies follow distinct paradigms tailored to the specific migration and governance contexts of each city (Alexander, 2007; Ambrosini, 2013; Caponio et al., 2016; de Graauw, 2019; Mahnig, 2004; van

Breugel, 2020). Finally, yet others advocate for a middle ground, arguing in favour of a ‘paradigmatic pragmatism’ at the local level, whereby local governments operate within broader ideological paradigms while pragmatically combining elements from various ideological viewpoints to effectively address specific issues (Good, 2019; Schiller, 2015).

To understand the factors influencing local migrant policies, scholars have created various typologies of municipal migration policies (Alexander, 2007; Good, 2019; van Breugel, 2020). These models encompass the values guiding migrant rights and responsibilities, as well as the governance of the decision-making and implementation processes (Sainsbury, 2006; Schiller, 2015, 2018). Governance looks at both the relationships between central and local authorities and the relationships involving public and non-public actors (Caponio et al., 2019). These models serve as valuable analytical frameworks for empirical research, facilitating a systematic exploration of policies in the current complex reality where various actors and government levels are involved in decision-making and implementation (Campomori & Caponio, 2017; Schiller, 2018; Teles, 2023).

Focusing on labour migration, Michael Alexander (2007) developed five local migrant policy paradigms encompassing the transient, guestworker, assimilationist, pluralist, and intercultural models. In the transient paradigm, municipalities find themselves in a non-policy phase, often ignoring migrants and relying on civil society services and ad hoc responses. Guestworker policies entail local authorities seeing migrants as fulfilling specific labour needs. Although their presence is acknowledged, it is perceived as temporary, with undocumented individuals typically overlooked. Local authorities assume limited responsibilities, primarily focused on addressing migrants’ basic needs (Alexander 2007). To broaden the scope of the guestworker paradigm beyond labour migration, I propose renaming it ‘guest-resident’ to include various migrant categories. This term conveys more comprehensively the idea that migrants, regardless of their status or purpose, are perceived as fulfilling temporary roles within the community—whether in the workforce, as recipients of humanitarian assistance, or in other capacities. This terminology acknowledges the diverse reasons for migration.

Alternatively, the three remaining paradigms see migrants as a permanent part of the community, each with a distinct approach (Alexander, 2007). The assimilationist paradigm seeks to integrate migrants by minimising any differences. The pluralist approach actively supports diversity, implementing proactive targeted policies. Lastly, the intercultural paradigm values diversity but recognises internal diversity in cultures, backgrounds, and experiences among individuals or groups within a community (Alexander, 2007).

This research employs Alexander’s analytical framework, as it offers a comprehensive tool to explore real-world scenarios, enriched by the governance literature’s insights. Specifically, regarding the vertical dimension of governance, this project’s analytical framework includes the differentiation between top-down, bottom-up, and two-way interactions between the national and the local level (Filomeno, 2016). These interactions reflect centralised decision-making, decentralised initiatives, or reciprocal influences, respectively. Alongside this, the framework distinguishes

between local governments' 'proactive' versus 'reactive' approaches to policy (van Breugel, 2020), characterising local governments as either independently initiating policies or responding to national directives and pressures. Finally, the framework also explores the relationship between local authorities and civil society, differentiating between multi-actor 'government' and 'governance' (Schiller, 2018). This distinction addresses traditional hierarchical structures compared to cooperative arrangements where various stakeholders, including non-governmental actors, share responsibilities and decision-making powers (Schiller, 2018).

The study schematises Athens's migrant policies regarding un(der)documented individuals and seeks to understand its decision-making. As prior research has often overlooked cities situated within highly centralised states, I believe that this empirical example can contribute to the refinement of local citizenship theories, which, in turn, could indicate that an alternative reality is possible for all those stripped of their rights and the rights that national citizenship provides. In line with Russell's (2019, p. 989) perspective, this study refrains from assuming that cities are "inherently progressive," but instead views them as a "strategic front" for developing a transformative politics of scale.'

11.3 National Context

For many decades, Greece has been a country of emigration, and its treatment of migrants has been characterised by exclusion and hostility, leaving many migrants in precarious situations. To understand Greece's migration policies, three factors must be considered: the foundational principles of ethnic and religious homogeneity upon which the modern Greek state was built, a weak economy coupled with a significant informal economy (Berger et al., 2014; Maroukis et al., 2011), and the extensive politicisation of migration.

Historically, Greece's political landscape has been dominated by two major parties: New Democracy (ND), a centre-right party, and PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), a social-democratic party. These parties alternated in power following the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974. However, the 2008 crisis disrupted this dominance, ushering in political instability. New parties gained greater political influence, including the Coalition of the Radical Left–Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA), a centre-left party, and smaller factions such as the far-right Golden Dawn (later convicted as a criminal organisation) and the right-wing ANEL (Independent Greeks). These shifts brought significant changes to migration policies, as we will explore further.

Given the numerous legal and policy changes over the years, documenting every alteration in migration law is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, the following sections outline three critical phases of Greece's recent migration history: Greece's migration landscape until 2008; from the socioeconomic crisis of 2008 to 2015; and migration since 2015.

11.3.1 Greece's Migration Landscape Until 2008

Greece's accession to the EU and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a turning point (Fig. 11.1), with increased migration from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, particularly Albania. Many migrants remained undocumented due to lax migration laws and demand for cheap labour in the informal economy and across sectors like agriculture, construction, tourism, and domestic work (DEMIG, 2015; Droukas, 1998; Fakiolas, 1999; Frangiskou et al., 2020). In response, Greece implemented measures to regularise migrants' status, a strategy often adopted by southern European countries (Geddes & Scholten, 2018).

The first migration law in 1929 remained inactive due to low migration rates (DEMIG, 2015). Significant legislative developments began in 1991, with stricter admission criteria, short-term residence permits (3–12 months), a ten-year residency prerequisite for naturalisation, and the criminalisation of irregular migration. Despite changes in political power, subsequent laws maintained an exclusionary approach (introducing further naturalisation criteria like language proficiency, familiarity with Greek history, and fees). Efforts to promote integration remained limited (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004; Kandylis, 2017; Vaiou, 2006), relying on the belief that migrants would naturally integrate through labour market engagement, aligning with a common European trend as noted by Martin Bak Jørgensen (2012). In the absence of comprehensive integration policies, migrants from Balkan and Eastern European countries, particularly Albanians, encountered hostile attitudes driven by xenophobia and amplified by mainstream media (Droukas, 1998; Geddes & Scholten, 2018; Koutrolidou & Siatitsa, 2012).

11.3.2 From the Socioeconomic Crisis of 2008 to 2015

The socioeconomic crisis of 2008 with negative GDP growth and unemployment exceeding 20% (Migration Data Portal, 2019; OECD, 2019; The World Bank, n.d.), coincided with social unrest, exemplified by the December 2008 riots following the murder of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos by a police officer and the sulfuric acid attack on migrant activist Konstantina Kouneva. This period marked a significant moment in Greece's modern history and had far-reaching consequences, including a substantial decline in net migration (Fig. 11.1) and the rise of the far-right movement.

In the following years, significant changes were made to migration policies such as citizenship acquisition reforms (Law 3838/2010), local voting rights for migrants (later ruled unconstitutional), and administrative restructuring (discussed later in this chapter). While positive initiatives emerged, including new resident permits and the establishment of a new Asylum Service, there were also instances of less favourable measures, such as border fencing and 'Sweep Operations'.

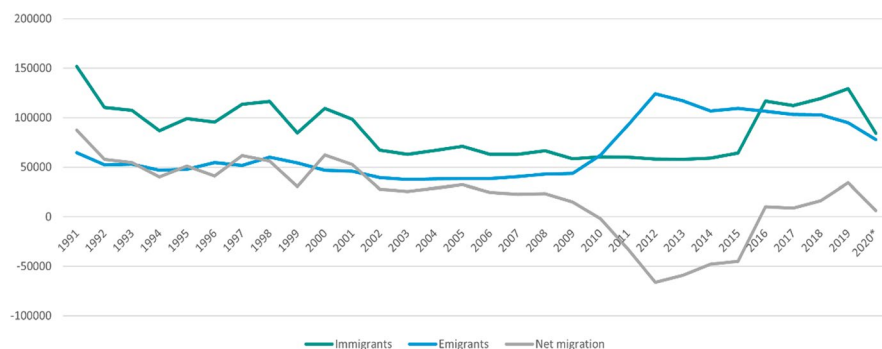


Fig. 11.1 Immigration, emigration and net migration, 1991–2020. (Source: Author’s own elaboration of the data reported by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2021), *Estimated Data)

In 2013, Greece published its first ‘National Strategy for the Integration of Third Country Citizens’ by the Ministry of the Interior. While the publication of an integration strategy is typically seen as a positive step, this policy not only excluded a significant number of people, such as asylum seekers, but also displayed a hostile attitude towards migrants, advocating in favour of cultural *homogeneity* (Ipourýío Esoterikón, 2013, p. 22). The strategy explicitly identified migration as a ‘threat’ (‘μεταναστευτική απειλή’, Ipourýío Esoterikón, 2013, p. 30), and emphasised that only high-skilled or entrepreneur migrants were welcome in the country, as they expected to make positive contributions (Ipourýío Esoterikón, 2013, p. 12).

11.3.3 Migration since 2015

In 2015, Greece faced a humanitarian crisis (MSF, 2016, 2017), with over 856,723 asylum seekers arriving—a 90.9% increase compared to the previous year (UNHCR, n.d.). This situation prompted UNHCR to declare a state of emergency within the EU for the first time. Reception facilities and emergency services were prioritised, while discussions on more comprehensive integration policies were also initiated (Frangiskou et al., 2020). The national elections that year revealed deep societal divisions, as the left-wing SYRIZA formed a coalition with the right-wing ANEL, while the far-right Golden Dawn secured a significant third-place position. This political contrast reflected the dual reality faced by migrants, who encountered both xenophobia-driven anti-migrant sentiments and solidarity movements providing initial emergency aid.

Under the SYRIZA government, a more humanitarian rhetoric to migration was adopted. The Ministry of Migration Policy and the Directorate for Social Integration were established, and a 2019 ‘National Integration Strategy’ emphasised interculturalism and migrant rights. This strategy encompassed immigrants, asylum

seekers, and beneficiaries of international protection (BIP), notably extending to individuals who might have lost their legal status (Ipourýio Metanastefikís Politikís, 2019, p. 12). However, this policy remained on paper, either due to political turn-over or, as noted by Frangiskou et al. (2020), because it may have been introduced to fulfil European policy obligations without genuine intent.

When New Democracy assumed power in 2019, the government embraced a stricter and exclusive stance on immigration, emphasising deportations and reducing social benefits (Boukala, 2021; Ipourýio Metanástefsis & Asílou, 2020). The 2022 National Integration Strategy and 2023 migration law faced criticism both from the research participants of this study and through official public consultation processes, for their narrow scope, rushed development, and limited engagement (Diktiakós Tópos Diavouléfseon, n.d., 2022). These policies reinforce the perception of migrants as temporary, portraying them as a burden on the Greek state rather than promoting their integration.

Contrary to Alexander's (2007, p. 83) expectation that southern European countries would diverge from the strict guestworker-type policies of their northern counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s, Greece appears to be aligning with them. Recent bilateral agreements with Bangladesh and Egypt in 2022 and 2023 (Nómos 4959/2022, n.d.; Nómos 5009/2023, n.d.) reflect this shift. For example, Bangladeshi workers are granted five-year residence permits, requiring 9 months of annual employment and mandatory return, while Egyptian seasonal agricultural workers receive nine-month permits, both without family reunification or long-term residence rights.

As of April 2023, Greece had issued 227,441 resident permits to EU nationals or expatriates, 471,456 for Third Country Nationals (TCNs), and 56,948 to BIP (Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2023). Non-Greeks constitute approximately 8% of the population (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011), with asylum applications periodically rising (Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2023). Official data concerning undocumented migrants is lacking—a vulnerable population facing restricted access to public services and limited housing rights (Nómos 4251/2014, n.d.). Exceptions are made for emergency healthcare, childbirth, minors' medical care and education, and limited social services provided by local governments (Nómos 3852/2010, n.d.; Nómos 4251/2014, n.d.; Nómos 5038/23, n.d.). Criticised for generating an undocumented population seen as criminal, the Greek system has further marginalised these individuals over time (Frangiskou et al., 2020; Papagiannakis, L., 2022, September 09, interview).

Overall, Greece's migration policies lack a coherent long-term plan, relying on reactive and ad hoc measures influenced by political considerations (Alexander, 2007; Frangiskou et al., 2020; Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2005; Koutrolíkou & Siatitsa, 2012). The state's ethnocultural identity and reliance on cheap labour contribute to exclusionary policies, treating migrants as temporary and unwanted rather than addressing their permanent integration.

11.4 Understanding Athens's Migrant Policies

Athens, as Greece's capital, has been a hub for migrants and a gateway to the EU since the 1980s. According to the 2011 census, non-Greek residents accounted for 22.8% of the city's population (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011). Most migrants are men (52%), with 46% aged between 25 and 44 years; the majority come from outside the EU, with Albanians constituting the largest subgroup at 40%. Many migrants are employed in low-skilled jobs and possess lower educational levels. However, this data is a decade old, and changes may have occurred due to the 2015 migration and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Athens's approach to migration must be understood within the institutional and political context in which it is formed. Greece is one of the most centralised states in the OECD (UCLG and OECD, 2016), following a top-down governance model (Filomeno, 2016). This centralisation limits the city's autonomy in governing its migrant population as it must align with the national paradigm and approach to immigration policies. Despite the 2006 Ratification Code of Municipalities and Communities and the 2010 Kallikratis Programme reforms, which aimed to extend local authorities' powers, cities' responsibilities and resources remain constrained. Consequently, since local engagement in integration is not legally required, implementation of strategies depends on each municipality's initiative (HDSSIMR, 2022, June 03, interview; Papagiannakis, L., 2022, September 09, interview; ALC, 2022, September 12, interview).

Nevertheless, Athens, as the capital, holds a unique position (Papagiannakis, L., 2022, September 09, interview; HDSSIMR, 2022, June 03, interview; HPEDSSD, 2023, January 23, interview), acting as an 'almost equal interlocutor and counterpart to the state' (Daskalaki, M., 2022, May 31, interview). As the next section discusses, local 'political will' plays a crucial role in shaping migrant policies. Athens's political landscape has mirrored national trends, with mayors shifting between the centre-right New Democracy party and the social-democratic PASOK party. Specifically, for the period studied here, Athens has been predominantly governed by New Democracy mayors, with Giorgos Kaminis (2011–2019) serving as an exception, supported by PASOK and other centre-left parties.²

11.4.1 *Political Will as the Architect of Policies*

For nearly four decades, Athens largely mirrored the national stance by neglecting the migrant presence, aligning with a 'non-policy' paradigm (Alexander, 2007). However, a shift emerged after 2010, a trend observed in other Greek cities too (Sabchev, 2020), partly triggered by the high level of migration in 2015. Specifically,

²At the time of publication, Athens had elected a new mayor supported by PASOK. This change occurred after the completion of the article so its impact is not reflected in the analysis.

under Kaminis's administration, Athens implemented progressive migrant policies, marking a departure from neglect. His administration adopted a 'proactive' stance (van Breugel, 2020), developing policies and services for immigrants ahead of the national government.

Key actions included the appointment of a Deputy Mayor for migration and the establishment of the Department for the Support and Social Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees. In 2011, Athens became one of the first Greek municipalities to establish a Migrant Integration Council (MIC) as an advisory body, followed by the introduction of the Migrants Integration Centre (KEM³), a national initiative of 'One-stop Shops' designed to provide a diverse range of services for migrants.

As noted by Expert1 (2022, September 09, interview), the strain on the city's infrastructures and resources during the 2015 migration events highlighted its limitations in addressing these issues alone. This led to collaborations with civil society and other municipalities, resulting in the creation of the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee Issues (ACCMR) and the Cities Network for Integration (CNI) (Expert1, 2022, September 09, interview). Athens also engaged in various projects, including the establishment of a refugee camp (Elaionas) and housing programmes coupled with integration services (ESTIA, Welcommon, Curing the Limbo), as well as international partnerships (e.g. '100 Resilient Cities', EURO CITIES, CITIES-Grow, Solidarity Cities, European Coalition of Cities against Racism). In 2019, Athens developed the first local integration strategy in Greece.

The shift in Athens's stance on migration can be understood within the context of the 2015 migration events, with Athens becoming a transient hub for migrants. This shift adhered to a pattern outlined by Gebhardt (2016), where cities embrace a more humanitarian approach to address the needs of un(der)documented migrants in exceptional circumstances. In Athens's case, however, this shift also highlights the crucial role of 'political will' in shaping policy decisions. As observed by Sabchev (2020) in Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city, Kaminis's administration in Athens too leveraged the capital's vertical (EU and international organisations) and horizontal (other municipalities and civil society) relationships, which provided funding, human capital, know-how, and resources, helping Athens navigate national restrictions and overcome its limited autonomy and resources.

However, it is important to note that most of these initiatives focused on applicants and BIP, which led to the refugee issue overshadowing broader migration concerns. The bulk of attention, funding, and policies were directed towards this specific population, as noted by Daskalaki (2022, May 31, interview), ALC (2022, September 12, interview), and GFM (2022, October 13, interview), leaving other migrant groups largely unaddressed. The HDSSIMR (2022, June 03, interview) explained that to address this gap, the Municipal Department for the Support and Social Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees began operating as a hybrid service,

³ Migration Integration Centres/Κέντρα Ένταξης Μεταναστών (KEM). I use the Greek abbreviation 'KEM', instead of MIC, to avoid the confusion with the Migrants Integration Council (MIC).

extending beyond established social policy boundaries to cater to third-country nationals, even without full authorisation from the central administration.

The importance of ‘political will’—in other words, the intertwined relationship between politics and policy decisions—is further highlighted by the return of the New Democracy party to the city government in 2019. The change in municipal authority led to a more ‘reactive’ approach (van Breugel, 2020), reducing the priority placed on migrant issues. Interviewees noted that Athens reduced its active engagement with migration, replacing the Deputy Mayor of migration with a special advisor, reducing services, diminishing communication, and withdrawing from international initiatives (Papagiannakis, L., 2022, September 09, interview; ALC, 2022, September 12, interview; GFM, 2022, October 13, interview).

As pointed out by several interviewees, shifts in municipal authority have significant implications for project continuity and execution. The GFM representative (2022, October 13, interview) underscored that such changes disrupt established connections and impede progress, creating uncertainty about responsibilities and undermining the consistent implementation of policies and services.

The ‘Curing the Limbo’ programme illustrates the impact of shifts in political will. Launched in 2018, this three-year pilot initiative was a collaboration between the municipality of Athens, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Catholic Relief Services, the International Rescue Committee, and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency. The programme aimed to provide affordable housing to refugees using vacant spaces and incentivising property owners (Polyak, 2018). It encompassed training in job skills, language proficiency, basic and soft skills, along with psychosocial support and networking with the neighbourhood (UIA, n.d.). However, the change in municipal authority in 2019 brought about challenges, as elaborated in the following passage.

But the municipal authority changed, and then the way the program was dealt with changed a lot...we had a big problem for a year...The programme was intended to last for three years. So, losing a year and losing the Municipality’s support for a year is very serious. Especially this happened when the implementation started... Imagine doing an open call to property owners... we never got approval... [or permission to] use municipal houses... There were some talks, but this discussion never took off. (Expert3, 2023, July 06, interview)

These political fluctuations illustrate the critical role of ‘political will’ in shaping local policies. The representative from Greek Forum for Migrants (GFM) (2022, October 13, interview) highlighted the impact of this dynamic, explaining:

When the municipal authority changes, so does the policy towards immigration...the staff members do not stay; they are usually relocated. This is what happens in Greece, and that is the big problem that everyone, depending on their...party affiliation, finds themselves in a position, and that is the big challenge we have.

In Athens the reliance on ‘political will’ is especially critical, given that politicians hold key positions in institutions and services. For example, the Special Advisor for Migration, appointed by the mayor, also serves as the president of both the MIC and the Centre for Reception and Solidarity (KYADA). The city’s dependence on ‘political will’ means that policy formulation is influenced by political considerations,

including the voting power of specific demographics (HPEDSSD, 2023, interview, 23 January). Thus, the limited political influence of migrants, stemming from their exclusion from local elections, further contributes to a laissez-faire attitude towards their integration.

11.4.2 *A Pragmatic Guest-Resident Paradigm*

In previous sections, I have highlighted the key factors affecting Athens's immigration policies, focusing on the top-down governance structure and the role of political will. This section delves into the specific policy paradigm Athens follows. Discussing a consistent policy paradigm in Athens is challenging as priorities fluctuate with changes in 'political will'. However, Athens appears to have transitioned from a 'non-policy' phase to what might be described as a 'pragmatic guest-resident' approach (Alexander, 2007; Schiller, 2015). Acknowledging the presence of immigrants, the city began providing basic services, yet without fully integrating them into society. Most of the migrants, particularly asylum seekers and BIP, are regarded as temporary occupants whose 'otherness is tolerated, not supported' (Alexander, 2007, p. 112).

As the interviewees highlight, the municipal approach involves limited responsibilities, with no substantial effort to incorporate migrants into the city's social fabric or to tailor services to their specific needs (Papagiannakis, L., 2022, September 09, interview; GFM, 2022, October 13, interview; Expert3, 2023, July 06, interview). This stance fits Alexander's (2007) description of the guest-resident paradigm where cities pragmatically address immediate migrant needs, which cannot be ignored 'as long as they are here' (Alexander, 2007, p. 111).

Athens's paradigm largely depends on piecemeal projects to meet migrants' needs (Daskalaki, M., 2022, May 31, interview, HDSSIMR, 2022, June 03, interview; GFM, 2022, October 13, interview), or as Expert1 (2022, September 09, interview) amply put it, on a *projectisation* of integration. Projectisation refers to the reliance on temporary, often ad hoc, projects to meet migrants' needs rather than through systematic, permanent policies. The municipality's actions are 'reactive' (van Breugel, 2020), limited in scope, and lack a holistic approach to genuine inclusion (Expert3, 2023, July 06, interview). As Daskalaki (2022, interview, May 31) notes: 'When you don't have good, stable funding, it becomes challenging to plan in a maximalistic way. What we're actually doing, and it's working, is approaching it like a puzzle.'

Athens's pragmatism is notably reflected in the provision of services aligning with alternative paradigms as per Alexander's (2007) models. For example, despite widespread criticisms of the MIC's effectiveness by the interview participants, its establishment corresponds to pluralist models (Alexander, 2007) and is considered 'a crucial step towards urban citizenship' (Gebhardt, n.d., p. 5). Other pragmatic actions include organising job fairs (Daskalaki, M., 2022, May 31, interview) and offering naturalisation courses (run by volunteers) through the KEM (ALC,

2022, September 12, interview). Moreover, the city exhibited its pragmatism during the Covid-19 pandemic by actively participating in the development and implementation of a vaccination programme for un(der)documented individuals (Ntaliou, 2024).

Athens's paradigm is further characterised by a *multi-actor 'government'* approach (Schiller, 2018), which involves a divided relationship with civil society marked by the instrumentalisation of NGOs and a problematic relationship with migrant communities. Specifically, NGOs play a vital role in providing services, and the ACCMR acts as a bridge between the municipality and civil society. However, their engagement is limited to service provision without real inclusion in decision-making processes (Papagiannakis, L., 2022, September 09, interview; Expert3, 2023, July 06, interview).

As Patuzzi (2020, p. 1) notes, the 2015 migration response fostered a 'fragile ecosystem of social innovation', where NGO services replaced public provisions, while migrant associations have been sidelined. The interviews of this research confirm this, underscoring that relations with the broader civil society, excluding NGOs, have become intricate. For instance, the municipality's stance on migrant squats has shifted from toleration to swift evictions (King & Manoussaki-Adamopoulou, 2019), while engagement with migrant communities, if any, is often ad hoc and informal. The GFM representative further clarifies this dynamic, noting:

[The municipality could] support the very communities themselves [but] there is no interaction at all; this, I believe, is the major issue-whether there is...collaboration at this level. Not just the kind of 'ah we're doing this, come and dance' or 'we'll have a meeting, come join us to show that we have a black person in the group'... we are not a wandering circus to be displayed...There needs to be a meaningful conversation at some point, and although this had started, along the way, it seems that it hasn't [continued]. (GFM, 2022, October 13, interview)

11.5 Conclusions

This study offers a comprehensive exploration of Athens's migrant policies, shedding light on the complex dynamics that shape its approach. I argue that Athens adheres to a 'Pragmatic Guest-resident' paradigm (Alexander, 2007; Schiller, 2015), marked by 'projectisation' and multi-actor 'government' (Schiller, 2018), involving the instrumentalisation of NGOs and challenges in engaging directly with migrant communities. The city's response to immigration illustrates a blend of pragmatism and adherence to a specific paradigm which dictates the extent of its initiatives, aligning with Schiller's (2015) observations on the 'pragmatic pragmatism' of local governance strategies.

Athens's case challenges assumptions about the inherently accommodating nature of the local level (see Montiel, Chap. 8, volume 1; Steinhilper and Sommer, Chap. 7, this volume). Instead, it shows that local policies are influenced by the unique context of each city, considering various levels and actors (see Kuge and Anders, Chap. 10, volume 1). Athens's paradigm mirrors a dynamic interplay

between historical context, governance structure, political considerations, and pragmatic responses within a rapidly changing migration context. Specifically, the study emphasises the pivotal role of governance, showing how vertical and horizontal governance dimensions affect local policy manoeuvring. Despite the ‘top-down’ governance constraints, the city’s ability to leverage supranational relationships for resources showcases potential local autonomy within a constrained national framework (Flamant, 2020; Sabchev, 2020). These findings align with literature suggesting that while the institutional powers of the local authorities are important, they are not the sole determinant of their responses (Ataç et al., 2020).

Most importantly, this study shows that ‘political will’—the varying priorities of political parties and leadership—plays an essential role in driving or stalling migrant integration efforts. Over the years, Athens has shifted from a ‘non-policy’ paradigm (Alexander, 2007) to a ‘proactive’ (van Breugel, 2020) more progressive stance after 2010, and back to a ‘reactive’ (van Breugel, 2020), more conservative approach, following the political changes. This finding verifies literature emphasising political factors as crucial in shaping local immigration policies (Caponio, 2010; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Martínez-Ariño et al., 2019).

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing migration governance and policy in urban settings. They also offer valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners, emphasising the need for institutionalising local authorities’ roles in immigrants’ incorporation and in fostering political involvement among migrants to ensure consistent attention to their rights and needs regardless of political fluctuations. The study also underscores the necessity for effective collaboration between local government and civil society to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of the city’s migration policies. In Athens, actionable suggestions include developing a comprehensive integration strategy as well as exploring alternative avenues for increased autonomy and secure funding, such as accessing EU grants. Facilitating migrant engagement through alternative venues, like bolstering the MIC, could address their exclusion from local elections. Lastly, incorporating ACCMR into the municipality’s official structure can safeguard its existence from changes in political will.

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Chapter 12

Precarious Status Families' Access to Early Childhood Services in a Sanctuary City: The Case of Toronto, Canada



Judith K. Bernhard, Julie E. E. Young, and Luin Goldring 

12.1 Introduction

Rights on paper are often at odds with rights in practice. Canada is known globally as a country that welcomes newcomers—over one million in the last 4 years. The federal government provides social welfare supports and benefits to assist parents (e.g. childcare subsidy, child tax benefit, and public health services). Many families headed by permanent residents and citizens are able, in varying degrees, to access these supports; some have found they can routinely count on them. Yet for precarious status families (PSFs), if even one member of a family does not have secure status, then stable and predictable access to early childhood services becomes a challenge. We employ Luin Goldring, Carolina Berinstein, and Judith Bernhard's (2009) definition of precarious status as including anyone who experiences any of the following: the absence of permanent work authorisation or permanent residence; dependence on someone else for one's status (e.g. sponsor or employer); limited or no social citizenship rights; and deportability.¹ Relatively secure status includes permanent residence (PR) and citizenship, though people in these situations may be subject to revocation and deportation.

¹Permanent residents can be deported under certain circumstances; citizenship can be revoked (Macklin, 2014; Reynolds & Hyndman, 2021).

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In many cases, all members of a family might share the same precarious form of status—for instance, if they arrived in the country and made a refugee claim, their status is uncertain while they await a determination on their application. In other cases, parents and children might hold different statuses; for example, children born in Canada would be Canadian citizens although their parents might not have access to status. For the latter families, entitlements—and actual access to services—do not necessarily hold evenly for all family members. While these ‘mixed-status families’ (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001; see also Menjívar & Abrego, 2009) might be thought of as a distinct form of PSFs, Jason Foster (2022) found that in Alberta, the status of parents influences the experiences of their children even when those children hold a status that entitles them to specific rights and services. For this reason, we use the concept of PSFs to draw attention to the shared experience of legal status precarity, rather than focusing on whatever ‘mixed’ status combinations may be present in a given family. We draw on Laura Enriquez’s (2015) research on the spillover effect of a parent’s status onto their children and rely on her concept of *multigenerational punishment* to draw attention to the consequent harms to children and, by extension, the entire family.

Responding to advocacy and campaigning, the City of Toronto, along with some other Canadian cities, has committed to making all municipal services available to newcomers, regardless of legal status. The stated goal of the corresponding AccessTO policy (City of Toronto, 2014, 2021b) is to lessen the deprivations experienced by precarious status residents by improving access to municipal services (for similar phenomena in Istanbul, see Peksen & Kurtarir, Chap. 10, this volume). Yet, little is known about the experiences of families with young children, and whether such policies effectively counter existing practices and promote greater inclusion.

All children in Canada, regardless of status, are protected under international instruments, most notably the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by Canada in 1991 (United Nations, 1989), as well as UN documents on implementing children’s rights in early childhood (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005). The Convention specifically underscores the importance of child-care, with Article 18 urging states to ‘take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.’ Where children of migrants in Canada are denied adequate housing, education, or access to pre- and post-natal care, these universal rights are denied.

The tension between the universal rights attached to children and the limited, temporary, or non-existent rights of their parents raises conceptual, empirical, and policy questions about how to understand—and remedy—the dire situation of precarious status families in a range of contexts. In the context of this study, precarious status families live in a liberal democratic state that affirms their universal rights and birthright citizenship, but they navigate their daily lives in the urban context of the City of Toronto where they are exposed to challenges related to housing, employment, and access to foodbanks, among others. As we will show, from published

sources, the way AccessTO has unfolded on the ground also contributes to the tension between universal and limited or no rights.

In this chapter, we consider the tension between the presumed universality of children's rights and the limited rights of one or more family member in PSFs. After reviewing the systemic effects of government policies that contribute to precarious status, we look briefly at previous research from Canadian and U.S. contexts regarding the structured disadvantages faced by families with children as the families attempt to access services. There is substantial literature on how people in non-status and temporary categories are produced by migration policies favouring short-term work permits and their limited access to public services. Less is known about the experiences of children living in such family contexts.

The main questions we addressed were as follows:

1. What are the effects of this tension between universal versus limited rights and how might this tension be experienced by PSFs?
2. How does this tension affect *actual* access to services for the children of families living with precarious legal status? We are not limiting ourselves to policy statements on paper regarding access.
3. How, within the Toronto Sanctuary City, are various actors, institutions, and policies implicated in limiting access to services for PSFs? We address issues related to different entitlements based on children's ages or minor status.
4. Concerning policies meant to remedy status-based exclusions, to what extent do they succeed in promoting access and lessening families' fears of deportation?

12.2 Methods

We use the family as the unit of analysis in recognition that an entire family experiences precarity when even one member's status is insecure. While the literature we reviewed focuses on nuclear families, we see no reason why it would not apply to any form of family. We began with a review of the scholarship on precarity and parenthood in the United States and Canada, examining research in areas such as children's experiences with precarious legal status, the challenges of 'parenting in the context of deportation risk' (Cardoso et al., 2018), accessing parenting and children's services, and considering different contexts of access in which people are seeking services. We then undertook an audit of policy versus practice in the three service areas in Toronto. This was done via a review of available policy and programme documents and an analysis of their regulations and requirements to understand how they might play out in practice.

In the next section we turn to sanctuary cities in Canada, focusing on Toronto. Through a review of studies of three service areas, we analyse where discrepancies lie between what the policy states and the experiences of families accessing services related to childbirth, childcare, and parenting programmes. In the final section we take a larger view of the findings.

12.3 The Canadian Context

In this section, we review research that demonstrates how precarity is produced through Canadian policy decisions, which is crucial for understanding the hardships experienced by PSFs. These hardships are systemic and anticipated rather than individual and ad hoc, although the families may blame themselves for their difficulties. We also argue, following the work of Francisco Villegas (2017), that it is crucial to look beyond families merely being permitted entry into Canada; we need to consider broader contexts and specific experiences of access, as well as the extent to which PSFs feel safe navigating the spaces and relationships with staff providing a given service—what could be considered a critical access framework.

This approach allows us to see how the tension between universal versus limited rights, and formal rights versus rights in practice, contributes to patchwork access (Landolt, 2022), and to local negotiations in the face of conditionalities imposed by policy (Goldring & Landolt, 2013). However, the reality that these negotiations are dynamic and respond to the circumstances of individual families means that they offer no permanent solution. We argue that the important gaps between what is promised in a sanctuary city and what PSFs can actually obtain perpetuate exclusionary bordering practices rather than eliminate restrictions. ‘Bordering practices’ refers to the screening and decision-making processes carried out by frontline workers and city officials, including municipal police, that create de facto internal borders and undermine the achievement of the universal-access goals stated on paper (a concerning situation that has been investigated and reported by various researchers (e.g., Atak, 2021; Connoy, 2020; Hudson et al., 2017; Hudson, 2021)).

12.3.1 *Sociopolitical Production of Precarious and Mixed-Status Families*

There is a well-established body of research on the role of state policies in producing precarious status through the expansion of temporary migration programmes and the use of citizenship and immigration policies to generate borders around access to social welfare (e.g. De Genova, 2013; Dauvergne, 2009; Dennler, 2018; Goldring et al., 2009; Moffette, 2021). Rather than framing precariousness as a result of individual or family level decisions, this chapter analyses systemic patterns and pathways created through government policies and official institutional practices. Several researchers have argued that such systemic ‘outcomes’ are built into economic systems and immigration policies as an implicit objective (Goldring et al. 2009; Portes, 1978; Rhus & Anderson, 2007), part of the wider production of segmented labour markets under racial capitalism (Ashiagbor, 2021). Harald Bauder (2013) suggested the term ‘illegalised migrant’ to capture the active role of the state in constituting a vulnerable labour force ‘beyond the protection of the law, to which labour standards, minimum wage legislation, and many other social and economic

rights and protections do not apply' (Bauder, 2013, p. 4). Some people who find themselves 'illegalised' may decide to remain in Canada. Changing family dynamics may be part of this decision.

These processes can be seen in the juxtaposition of several late-1960s policy moves. Nandita Sharma (2001) has drawn attention to the historical fact that even as the Canadian government was removing explicitly racist immigration restrictions in its 1967 Immigration Act, which introduced the Points System for the evaluation of potential permanent migrants, it simultaneously introduced ways to deny some people access to Canadian entitlements by establishing a temporary migration programme with the Jamaican government. Charmaine Crawford (2003) discussed the effects of these policies on children. The Canadian government's 'importation' of Caribbean caregivers via this new domestic worker programme required them to be single and without dependents to qualify to work in Canada. Many people who entered Canada through this scheme had to conceal their motherhood, even as their work entailed raising other people's children. These temporary worker programmes offer the clearest examples but others—including student and visitor visa systems and the refugee claim process—may also contribute to family separation. Crucially for our work, authorities have shown a long-standing wilful ignorance of family relationships deriving from racist ideals of national membership in Canadian society.

Goldring and Landolt (2013) have noted the 'multi-actor negotiations' required to live in Canada with precarious status. They also note that legal status trajectories, including the process of trying to gain permanent status, are usually 'non-linear, often lengthy, and can involve moments of irregularization, regularization, and illegalization' (Goldring & Landolt, 2013, p. 3) as people interact with policies and institutions. Trying to obtain secure status is not only unpredictable, it also takes time, money, and other resources involved in the 'work of status' (Goldring, 2022; Goldring et al. 2024). Families navigating precarious legal status trajectories have less energy and fewer financial and other resources available to deal with other issues.

12.3.2 Structured Disadvantages Faced by Precarious Status Families

We find that many studies, despite examining immigration status, are relatively silent on the family as a relationship and focus for analyses of precarious status (though see, for example, Bernhard et al., 2007). There has been important work regarding school-aged children around the challenges of registration (Bejan & Sidhu, 2010; Casas Hernandez, 2022; Sidhu, 2008; Villegas, 2013, 2018) and experiences of access (Aberman et al., 2016; Landolt & Goldring, 2019; Villegas, 2017; Young, 2005, 2013) but the period before children are required to attend school is not well addressed in existing scholarship. Elsewhere, we offer a review that includes access to schooling for PSFs with young children (Bernhard et al., 2023).

Research from midwifery and nursing addresses parents' experiences during birth and families' (in)ability to access pre-and post-natal care (Magalhaes et al., 2010; Merry et al., 2011). For example, Jill Hanley et al. (2020) explored the challenging working conditions of pregnant women in Montreal, finding that the physical difficulty of assigned tasks took a toll on the women and the instability of their employment created complications during pregnancy. Many PSFs experienced food insecurity and reported having to return to work 2 weeks to 2 months after giving birth, while others found their employers had replaced them without notice. Foster (2022) compared access to services among those living in Alberta with Canadian-born children versus others who either had no children or had children here that were born outside the country and found, paradoxically, that those with citizen children were worse off. These parents chose not to access services to avoid the risks of increased contacts with authorities, meaning children were denied the benefits of citizenship in spite of entitlements.

Other research in the Canadian context demonstrates the importance of making connections with families and children in similar situations. Thalia Aubé, Sarah Pisanu, and Lisa Merry (2019) described the approach used in a Montreal health and community centre called *La Maison Bleue*. Many precarious status parents they interviewed benefitted from meeting other PSFs and participating in programmes where their children could safely have friendships with children in similar situations. The staff of professionals were able to build on mothers' protective factors (e.g. faith and cultural traditions, maintaining the home language with their children), while also encouraging local and transnational exchanges. Although the workers went to great lengths to remove access barriers and connect the mothers to community organisations, individual case-by-case efforts cannot solve larger systemic issues. The pattern in these data is consistent with Patricia Landolt's concept of patchworks of access in that the workers' personal contacts were used to 'diversify and extend the entitlements of precarious noncitizen health seekers' (Landolt, 2022, p. 82).

12.4 Toronto as a Sanctuary City

We turn now to the City of Toronto, one of the handful of municipalities in Canada with a formal sanctuary city policy. Access to City Services for Undocumented Torontonians—shortened to AccessTO and also known as 'Access without Fear'—formally provides access to municipally operated services for Toronto's precarious status residents (City of Toronto, 2014, 2021b).

Providing context regarding the (in)accessibility of services for precarious status residents prior to AccessTO, Sidhu (2013) found through a Toronto-wide survey that a range of service organisations were requiring various forms of documentation to access their services. More significantly, the survey found that 'thirty per cent of respondents stated they would share a service user's immigration status information with the police or Citizenship and Immigration Canada, depending on the

circumstance.' Given this situation, we wonder whether families might still be fearful of trying to access services after the implementation of AccessTO even if their ID is not required.

Since the inception of AccessTO, there have continued to be reports of access barriers despite support for the policy among advocates, municipal staff, and service providers (Hudson et al., 2017). Jurisdictional questions intersect with and influence how AccessTO plays out. Some providers may have their hands tied by provincial and federal rules about how funds can be used and who can be supported. Crucially, although municipal police forces are not responsible for the enforcement of immigration law, they have been found to regularly act in cooperation with provincial and federal law enforcement authorities. The practice of information-sharing amongst law enforcement agencies means that any encounter with local police puts families with precarious status at risk of being apprehended or reported to immigration authorities (Hershkowitz et al., 2020; Moffette, 2021). Families encounter workers who believe misinformation, stigmatise them, and may end up denying access. In some instances, service providers deny access based on a perception that parents and children with precarious legal status have 'jumped the immigration queue' and are not 'deserving' of admission to a programme or service (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014; Dennler, 2020). Misinformation among frontline bureaucrats is difficult to address even as it remains critical to the success of AccessTO.

In what follows, we examine the policies and practices in three service areas that are essential to families with young children to analyse the discrepancies between what policies state and families' experiences in accessing services related to childbirth, childcare, and parenting programmes. In this sense, we look at how families encounter and navigate multiple internal borders as they attempt to access services for their children.

12.4.1 *Childbirth*

Along with access to support during the process of birth, access to pre- and post-natal care is essential to ensuring the health and well-being of children and parents. Although publicly funded healthcare is a cornerstone of Canada's national identity, it is funded, regulated, and managed by all levels of government (Landolt, 2022). The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (2022) argued that municipal governments play crucial roles in supporting public and community health and ought to be more directly engaged in broader healthcare planning and discussions. In a review of municipal Financial Information returns from 2018, the Association found that, '80% of municipal operating expenditures contribute in some way to the social determinants of health.' That is, they are health-related. A solution to the jurisdictional tension might be for AccessTO to reframe the relationship between municipal and provincial funding. As it stands, provincial control of healthcare overdetermines what is possible, meaning that the municipal and public health roles add layers of complexity to healthcare access even as they try to mitigate exclusions.

In most cases it is the province that determines eligibility for health services—which impacts access to healthcare. In Toronto, the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) covers eligible provincial residents, allowing them to visit hospitals and doctors' offices without paying a user fee. To receive an OHIP card, applicants must be a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident, a recognised Convention refugee, on a valid work permit, or have a temporary resident permit (Government of Ontario, 2022). Normally there is a compulsory three-month wait period to activate OHIP from the time of arrival in the province; during this time, migrants have no coverage unless they pay for private insurance.

In March 2020, the Ontario provincial government instituted temporary health measures to address the Covid-19 pandemic. These included removing the three-month OHIP wait period and expanding access to Covid-19 measures and medically necessary healthcare for medically uninsured residents, including precarious status migrants. This policy ended after March 2023, but shows that the province is open to providing access to PSFs. Refugee claimants, however, are eligible under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP), which covers access to doctor and hospital visits, pre-natal and post-natal care, and diagnostic and ambulatory services (Government of Canada, 2021). From 2012 to 2016, there were significant changes to the IFHP that contributed to confusion among service providers and families with precarious status (see Rink et al., 2017 for data gathered in Montreal). Most families with precarious status, however, are ineligible for OHIP or IFHP coverage and are billed for any treatment obtained through the public healthcare system.

PSFs can access healthcare through a network of community health clinics funded by the provincial government. In Toronto, this includes the Non-Insured Walk-In Clinic operated by Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre and clinics operated by Unison Health and Community Services. Midwife collectives such as Kensington Midwives and Seventh Generation Midwives are connected to a hospital and have financial birthing agreements with that institution for their precarious status clients. What began as ad hoc arrangements have evolved into formal partnerships. As Landolt's (2022) study found, workers at one Community Health Clinic (CHC) reached out to a hospital with which they had an existing relationship and were able to negotiate a programme that provides support to 25 pregnancies at no charge each year based on need rather than relying on notions of 'deservingness' related to status.

Despite the important roles played by CHCs in supporting healthcare needs of PSFs, we know that in practice, accessing pre-natal, birth, and post-natal care presents barriers. For example, studies have found that women who had just given birth were denied or chose not to receive post-natal care, a service for which they qualified, due to fear of exposing their legal status (Merry et al., 2011; Wilson-Mitchell & Rummens, 2011). Merry et al. (2011) found that half of the participants in their study were suffering from post-partum depression, which can have long-term consequences for children and might have been ameliorated by timely treatment. Merry et al. (2011) also reported that some of the women spoke of paediatricians who were unwilling to accept IFHP insurance for appointments for their infants.

Jurisdictional limitations on healthcare entitlements combine with ongoing barriers to access. This means that in many cases, despite the existence of CHCs and community-based programmes that support PSFs, young children in these families remain dependent on the persistent effort of their parents and frontline social service professionals to negotiate with hospitals. These same individuals exercise discretion over which categories of precarious status are considered 'deserving of' access (Landolt, 2022).

12.4.2 *Childcare*

Childcare is not only an investment in children's development, but also an economic support for families that enables parents to work (Polyzoi et al., 2020). For a parent living with precarious status, safe and trustworthy childcare is an essential service. Access to the 43 city-run childcare centres in Toronto requires an identification card, but not income or immigration information (City of Toronto, 2021a), suggesting this service could potentially be accessed by PSFs. We obtained registration forms from three licensed childcare centres in Toronto to examine the potential challenges faced by PSFs trying to access these centres. None of these centres required proof of income, Social Insurance Number (SIN), or immigration status for registration; however, cost remained an important issue (MacDonald & Friendly, 2022).

In 2022, Canada and the province of Ontario signed the Canada-wide Early Learning Child Care (CWELCC) agreement to support a universal and inclusive system that would be accessible to all families (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). This has resulted in progressive reduction of the cost of licensed childcare as well as the creation of new, affordable childcare spaces. The goal is to reach a provincial average of CAD10 a day by 2026 (Friendly et al., 2023; Government of Canada, 2022; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022). Current mandates specify that Toronto programmes participating in CWELCC have reduced their fees by 52.75% (City of Toronto, 2024a) and the province of Ontario has announced a fee cap of CAD22 per day starting in January 2025 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024).

Nonetheless, at the present time, the subsidy system continues to be operated by the City of Toronto, along with the CWELL agreement. In establishing the eligibility criteria for subsidy access (City of Toronto, 2024b), the City of Toronto must comply with provincial legislation and policies. To qualify for a fee subsidy, families are not required to reveal their immigration status but must provide a Notice of Assessment (i.e., confirmation from the Canada Revenue Agency that an individual has filed income taxes in a given year) and be able to demonstrate that they meet 'activity' requirements (i.e., they must have proof that they are either employed, involved in a refugee determination process, or a full-time student). Nonetheless, providing proof of income tax is often not possible for families in the midst of a complex process of trying to regularise their status. Consequently, AccessTO (City of Toronto, 2014) is limited in its ability to supply subsidies to PSFs.

Families where members are refugees should be eligible to apply for subsidy since most do file an annual tax return to the federal government. Nevertheless, Gillian Morantz et al. (2013) documented problems among refugee claimants who had qualified for the subsidy, most importantly the abrupt withdrawal of subsidy. These researchers also found great confusion and variation in the application of childcare subsidy policies for refugee claimants within Canada. This situation further complicates access even for those precarious status families who should qualify.

Even where families may be entitled to access licensed childcare services, they may be fearful of revealing their status, feel particularly subject to surveillance, or be reluctant to access supports. It is clear that most PSFs would not be able to access licensed childcare due to both documentation requirements and affordability issues.

12.4.3 Parenting and Community Programmes

Since so much needs to be negotiated to access key services to support children, parents greatly benefit from a place to talk to other parents, learn about and support their children's wellbeing, and get connected to other service providers including legal aid (Tungohan, 2018). Of particular significance is the network of EarlyON Child and Family Centres that offer a range of supports and services for parents and children up to the age of 6 years. In Ontario, a province of about 15 million people, there are over 1100 EarlyON Centres, 241 of them located in the City of Toronto and many easy to reach by public transit. They provide parenting programmes offered by registered early childhood educators trained in early childhood development, and important opportunities to develop connections with other families and additional services. The EarlyONs also have a drop-in component that provides safe spaces for children to engage in early learning and care. These centres often operate out of existing community hubs such as libraries, schools, and community centres. Importantly, there are no immigration, income, or identification requirements to access these centres (Government of Ontario, 2022).

Parents often come to EarlyON through the following process: many of the EarlyONs are attached to a health centre where precarious status parents present themselves for medical reasons. Once there, they are then invited to speak to settlement workers about broader supports and are introduced to the EarlyON as a safe space where all are welcome, regardless of status. In this sense, the health clinics act as a crucial link to further services. The staff at both the clinics and the EarlyONs have a chance to use knowledge of municipal, provincial, and federal regulations to extend services and help parents to make vital connections. Although there is no documentation on the experiences of PSFs at EarlyONs, these settings seem promising as a place where families can safely go to meet others, reduce stress, and participate in parenting programmes.

12.5 Discussion

The many municipal workers who advocated for the AccessTO policy were crucial in the establishment of the 'Toronto Newcomer Strategy' (City of Toronto, 2021b), a framework that takes a broad approach to the definition of newcomers. Many City of Toronto workers and policymakers dedicate themselves to ensuring that the city will align its service delivery with the principles of the best interests of the child and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* that Canada ratified in 1991.

The City, and especially the advocates who lobbied for access without fear, are to be commended for this important move of implementing sanctuary policies. Current evidence, however, suggests that the protection offered to families continues to be a patchwork a decade after the official adoption of AccessTO. There are a great number of informed and effective frontline workers. In the literature we reviewed, however, there are a surprising number of references to staff who are still not adequately aware of the City's sanctuary policies and act as gatekeepers to families attempting to navigate the system and access services (Hudson, 2021; Hudson et al., 2017; Rink et al., 2017). This problem is not simply the fault of the staff because they are dealing with the patchwork of regulations at several levels (for similar phenomena in Copenhagen see Salifu & Jorgensen, Chap. 5, this volume; for issues related to local policies, see Bruce & Crettex, Chap. 8, this volume).

This chapter represents one of the first comprehensive attempts to review literature on the implementation of AccessTO policies in areas related to children. We examined documents and materials on the practices related to PSF families in Toronto and focused particularly on services in the areas of childbirth, childcare, and parenting schemes. We found that there are great discrepancies between how policies are stated and actual experiences of attempts to access. Many families are so intimidated they do not even attempt to obtain childcare and other services for their children. When they do attempt to access services, they find restrictions, complications, and a lack of clarity as to what is required for access. In a number of instances, frontline workers are not aware of the real dangers faced by these families.

Many workers process families according to a framework that distinguishes citizens and permanent residents from all others, arbitrarily privileging the rights of this group despite all being residents of the city. These practices directly contravene the stated purposes of AccessTO and the 'Toronto Newcomer Strategy' (City of Toronto, 2021b). Upon closer examination we found that grey areas and blurry boundaries are in fact features of the current system (Hudson, 2021). Frontline and administrative staff, in practice, often draw boundaries around access. This systematically erodes the legal universality of the rights of the child.

Besides direct immediate harms to parents, children in PSFs suffer consequences. This spillover where the child is punished for the parents' legal status has been called multigenerational punishment (Enriquez, 2015). Even where the children are Canadian citizens with full and secure rights, they may not gain access to services. For example, parents may be unable to provide the necessary documentation or may

be fearful of revealing *their* status by attempting to access services like post-partum care or licensed childcare.

In each of the service areas we analysed, parents encounter a range of attitudes from providers willing or unwilling to alleviate their concerns by providing access. There is great variation among frontline workers in their understandings of AccessTO policies. Some workers, through their informal networks, are able to be extremely effective in securing services. Many frontline workers and service providers find creative ways to deal with bureaucracies and assist families as they navigate parenting with precarious status and seek supports for their young children. In Toronto, EarlyONs are an important example of such spaces. As in the work of Landolt (2022), access often depended on networks of contacts between agencies and did not adequately address the issue of status. Yet what is needed is truly universal access without internal boundaries.

Navigations of access are complicated by the reality that services delivered at the local level are tied into a web of regulatory and funding requirements imposed by different levels of government. This labyrinth of federal, provincial, and municipal rules means that parents facing years of legal uncertainty are unable to consistently access supports to which their children may be entitled.

Families face a complex task of securing resources for their children, including those who are Canadian citizens. In this vein, Goldring (2022) has focused on the great amount of ‘work’ involved in maintaining or improving one’s status –i.e., ‘the effort, time and resources that migrants and non-migrants put into dealing with the conditionalities of presence and access’ (Goldring, 2022, p. 2). All of these involve complex negotiations with agencies and multiple government entities and jurisdictions. Focusing on the negotiations required to access services in each of the areas reviewed above, one gets an idea of the immense burden on parents’ time and energy. In addition to the struggles around income and food insecurity, affordable housing, and dealing with immigration consultants, perhaps it is easier to keep children at home or in unlicensed informal care rather than to find childcare that could result in the family’s legal status being exposed.

To conclude, the goals of AccessTO remain far from the reality of what precarious status families with young children experience in their day-to-day lives. Decades of policy shifts and advocacy work have resulted in the current situation. Confusing regulatory frameworks and limited resources contribute to the fact that perceptions of deservingness are still often acted upon instead of finding ways to connect people who need additional supports to find security for their families. The AccessTO policies need to be refined and their implementation needs to be further studied. There is a lack of recent, published data in this area. The current patchwork of service delivery is inadequate and likely to result in long-term and negative outcomes for both parents and children.

This study looked at Toronto; however, its findings have implications for other cities that are considering or already committed to sanctuary policies. Because these policies are typically municipal, sanctuary policies inevitably run into difficulties due to multi-jurisdictional tensions. This holds whether they involve police (Hershkowitz et al., 2020) or a particular public service, such as education or

healthcare (Aubé et al., 2019). This chapter's focus on families and the limits to universality principles as reflected in actual practices underscores the need for more research on PSFs in other parts of Canada and other countries and jurisdictions to better understand and draw attention to the limits of these principles. Such research can contribute to advocacy and efforts to expand universality in practice.

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Chapter 13

‘The Second You Trust Somebody, You Pass That Information On’: Cultural Liaison Work with Mexican and Central American Immigrant Entrepreneurs



Tara Carr-Lemke 

13.1 Introduction

Latin American immigrant-owned enterprises in the United States generate economic value, strengthen social bonds, and revitalise neighbourhoods. They build financial stability for their owners and employment options for community members. When these enterprises are registered with the government, they can benefit from opportunities for financing, training, liability protection, and development. Yet registering a business requires trust that one’s personal information, including immigration status, will be handled with care—trust that immigrants may not have in government entities or agencies perceived to be their proxies. How can localities foster trust that encourages immigrant entrepreneurs to register businesses and participate in the formal business sector?

Linking the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship with that of sanctuary and cultural liaisons, in this chapter I examine Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurship in sanctuary and non-sanctuary jurisdictions. Drawing on interviews with immigrant entrepreneurs and supporting organisations from four U.S. counties with sizeable urban centres, I argue that while sanctuary policy informs the behaviours of entrepreneurs, it does not define them. Instead, interviews highlight the key role of culturally-responsive and representative nonprofit and government agency staff in building trust and engaging entrepreneurs in the formal business ecosystem. These cultural liaisons help entrepreneurs navigate the multi-scalar particularities of their context, including the sanctuary regime, to develop and sustain businesses. The chapter deepens theories of immigrant incorporation by recognising how liaisons reshape conditions for the entrepreneurial process and identifies recommendations that localities can adopt to support immigrant entrepreneurs.

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The chapter starts with a review of the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, the impacts of sanctuary policy on trust, and the influence of cultural liaisons. It then presents the methods employed in this research and discusses findings. It concludes with considerations for policymaking and future research.

13.2 Literature Review

13.2.1 *Latin American Immigrant Entrepreneurship*

Research on Latin American-operated businesses in the United States reveals a rapidly evolving landscape.¹ Entrepreneurs with Latin American heritage start new businesses at a higher rate than the U.S. average (Flood et al., 2018). Over the past decade, they have launched higher numbers of small and microenterprise businesses than any other ethnic group (Orozco et al., 2020). These businesses have reported higher average revenue growth than that of the U.S. economy, with particular gains in manufacturing, construction, transportation, leisure, and hospitality (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Orozco, 2020).

Yet these entrepreneurs face a host of hurdles: accessing and drawing down capital; learning about and operating within the confines of the U.S. business legal infrastructure and local commercial codes; and navigating public policies affecting commercial enterprises. Differences of language, culture, education, and migratory status complicate the process of launching and sustaining a business (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Rubach et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs encounter the added complication of a punitive federal immigration enforcement regime that seeds fears of deportation and family separation and decreases trust in institutions, including those positioned to assist business development (Bernstein, et al., 2020; García Hernández, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018; Theodos, et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2019).

Key to successful Latino entrepreneurship is multilingual and culturally-responsive access to information and capacity-building around U.S. business practices, regulations, licensing, and financial reporting (Albro & Hershberg, 2021; Kalu & Okafor, 2021; Theodos et al., 2021). Entrepreneurs access and utilise these resources when they trust the sources of delivery (Huang & Liu, 2019; Lee & Black, 2017). This issue may be particularly acute for Mexicans and Central Americans, the Latin Americans who have become the face of ‘problem’ immigration in national debate (Bellovary et al., 2020; Chávez & Provine, 2009).

¹Research on Latin American entrepreneurs frequently combines native- and foreign-born individuals. Wherever possible, I articulate if these groups are disaggregated in the literature.

13.2.2 *Sanctuary*

As noted by Harald Bauder (2017), the notion of sanctuary is ambiguous, particularly given the diversity of groups across national contexts and legal systems that employ the term. In this chapter, sanctuary is defined as a U.S. county that limits cooperation with federal immigration agents through a refusal to enact 287(g) agreements, which allow local law officials the ability to conduct federal enforcement duties along with other restrictive practices (National Conference of State Legislators, 2021). Proponents of sanctuary argue that sanctuary promotes trust in local public institutions while anti-sanctuary policies function in reverse (Cervantes & Menjivar, 2018; Cruz Nichols et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2019). If successful Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurship is facilitated by trust in public and private institutions that administer business registration and development, then sanctuary could be a facilitating factor.

Emerging research interrogates understandings of the influence of county- and city-level sanctuary policy on immigrant well-being, arguing that xenophobia and structural barriers to housing, employment, healthcare, and education even within sanctuaries negatively impact the non-status immigrant population (Houston, et al., 2023). Bauder (2017) maintains that sanctuaries fall short of attacking the roots of oppression, and Ananya Roy (2019) argues that sanctuaries fail to challenge a repressive criminal justice system. This research underscores the gaps between sanctuary rhetoric and actual impact on immigrant realities.

13.2.3 *Cultural Liaisons*

Organisations that seek to support Mexican and Central American immigrants must contend with barriers to trust to promote their work. One approach is to hire multi-lingual and multicultural staff to function as cultural liaisons (Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005). Liaisons operate as bridges between agencies and immigrant communities and can foster collaboration (Roth & Grace, 2018). Particularly in locales with an established immigrant community, some immigrant-centred non-profits have been founded by co-ethnics, operate with cultural and linguistic knowledge, and offer access to political networks in addition to concrete services (Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Galvez, 2007). In new immigrant destinations, mainstream social service agencies without cultural expertise may fill the gap (Roth & Allard, 2016). Both types of agencies rely on cultural liaisons for the critical work of serving as go-between and interpreter circulating within social networks. In mainstream organisations, they may refashion entities into culturally competent and responsive agencies (Roth & Grace, 2018). The literature on Latin American immigrant entrepreneurship suggests that immigrant entrepreneurs look to trusted institutions with liaisons like schools, healthcare facilities, and houses of worship that reproduce cultural norms and uphold shared community values in the process of

establishing and sustaining businesses (Griffith, 2020). One priority value is sensitivity in maintaining the confidentiality of immigration status of community members.

13.2.4 Motivating Questions

As noted above, researchers have demonstrated that culturally-responsive access to funding, education, and relevant information on U.S. business practices, local commercial codes, licensing, and financial reporting are key factors to successful Latin American entrepreneurship. Lack of trust in financial and public institutions charged with business development shapes the willingness and ability of Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs to register their businesses, access business training opportunities, and apply for loans. Trust is shaped in part by federal immigration enforcement policies and the practices of local law enforcement. Less is known about the specific policy levers that institutions could use to enhance trust among Latin American entrepreneurs or the potential role of cultural liaisons in this effort. Counties that have opted against collaborations with federal authorities to enact immigration enforcement argue that their policies prevent unlawful detentions and the breakup of families and communities and enhance trust. But beyond legal protections, are county-level sanctuary policies associated with additional supports for immigrants? Are there spillover effects on other aspects of immigrants' lives such as economic opportunities like small business development? With these questions in mind, the research asks if a jurisdiction's sanctuary status contributes to trust and boosts Mexican and Central American immigrants' willingness to register their businesses, participate in capacity-building opportunities, or apply for loans.

13.3 Methods

As a part of a larger study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs and staff from related organisations. The interviews were held in four counties featuring a significant regional metropolitan centre: Franklin, Ohio (Columbus); Maricopa, Arizona (Phoenix); Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia); and Wake, North Carolina (Raleigh).

13.3.1 Case Selection

Four cases were selected primarily for county-level sanctuary policy, drawn from the analysis of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (2019), which classifies county-level immigration enforcement policies along a sanctuary scale. Using this

method, Franklin and Philadelphia Counties rank as robust and Maricopa and Wake as limited sanctuary jurisdictions. The ranking suggests that immigrants would enjoy the benefits of sanctuary at higher rates and degrees in the robust regimes than in the limited.

Because the length of time a demographic resides in a place affects its incorporation, the cases were also considered in light of gateway status for immigrants (Price & Chacko, 2009; Wang & Li, 2007; Winders, 2012). Three cases are categorised as emerging or remerging and are currently addressing issues of immigrant integration, particularly for newcomers from Latin America who are a greater share of the immigrant population than these sites have historically experienced (Singer, 2015). The exception is Maricopa County, which as a former territory of Mexico has a historically contentious relationship with 'migrants' (de Bustamante, 2012).

Table 13.1 presents characteristics related to demographics, sanctuary policy, and entrepreneurship. It illustrates the differences in resources for entrepreneurs across cases.

Table 13.1 Key characteristics of cases

	Franklin, OH	Maricopa, AZ	Philadelphia, PA	Wake, NC
Total population (U.S. Census 2020)	1.32 million	4.42 million	1.60 million	1.13 million
Immigrant population (U.S. Census 2020)	11%	14.7%	14.3%	13.3%
County seat	Columbus	Phoenix	Philadelphia	Raleigh
Sanctuary type (ILRC, 2019)	Robust	Limited	Robust	Limited
Statewide sanctuary law	No	No	No	No
Welcoming City affiliate (Welcoming City affiliation refers to the core city's membership in Welcoming America, a network which adopts accommodating policies towards immigrants (Welcoming America, n.d.))	Yes	No	Yes	No
Gateway type (Singer, 2015)	Minor-emerging	Major-emerging	Re-emerging	Minor-emerging
Gov't office for immigrants	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	Yes	Multiple	Yes	Yes, but statewide scope
Latino-serving banks/CDFI	Multiple	Multiple	Multiple	Multiple
Spanish spoken at Small Business Development Center?	Only at location across state	Variable	Yes	No

13.3.2 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews of between 20 and 120 min with 100 participants from July 2020 to August 2021: 48 citizen and non-citizen Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs and 52 staff from organisations that resource entrepreneurs from these communities. Purposive participant sampling methods informed by the approach of researchers studying a range of migration issues began with internet searches for nonprofit and government organisations that support small business, Latin American immigrant entrepreneurship, and Latin American immigrant organising and social service provision (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Menjívar, 2011; Pisani, 2012). Interviews were coded and assessed for themes related to cultural liaisons using a multi-step inductive process to identify emerging patterns in Nvivo (Saldaña, 2013). The organisations are not listed here as some serve immigrants working without authorisation and therefore require discretion.

13.4 Findings

A segment of Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs experience fear or discomfort when sharing the personal information required to register businesses and apply for loans: for some, this fear is based on concerns around documentation while for others it flows from cultural norms about indebtedness or the banking sector. Cultural liaisons play a key role in mitigating concerns, explaining processes, and translating between systems across sanctuary types.

Interviews reveal a constellation of actors and entities that function as cultural liaisons in both robust and limited sanctuary jurisdictions and across gateway types. The liaisons interviewed for this research frequently operate out of nonprofit organisations, but may also work as a freelance community organiser or be affiliated with a government or corporate entity. Their role is to bridge individual entrepreneurs and institutions that may be inaccessible due to language and cultural barriers, as well as the real or perceived obstacle of missing legal documentation. Several key themes emerged from the interviews.

13.4.1 Bridges Between Entrepreneurs and Services

Each case includes examples of cultural liaisons acting as a conduit between entrepreneurs and public and private institutions. Latinx-led organisations play an essential role in advocating for Mexican and Central American-owned business and are a common home for cultural liaisons. A Mexican American staff person at a Latinx-supporting business association in Maricopa County describes her reaction upon

learning that constituents were unable to access training for a loan facilitated by a government agency due to language barriers:

I'm like, well, let me see what I can do. So I reached out to the city. And I'm like, 'Hey, you know, do you think we can do this in Spanish? If we can have a separate class with the Spanish-speakers?' And they did. They were very good, they provided it simply because I knew [staff person] who worked for [agency] and was working on that project.

The liaison has the confidence and knowledge to communicate directly with the city on behalf of her members. She also has relationships with staff within the city bureaucracy to whom to direct her ask. Furthermore, she has built trusting relationships with association members that facilitate the sharing of their needs with her—core to the function of effective cultural liaisons (Roth & Grace, 2018).

When asked about entrepreneurs' abilities to develop their businesses in Wake County, a Mexican organiser comments:

One of the biggest advantages that we have in Wake County is we do have some other Latino-led organisations there...and you can see it with a lot of the things that have happened in the past ten years in terms of international and multicultural festivals, [and] a [Hispanic] Chamber of Commerce.

The participant identifies the concrete impacts local Latinx-led organisations have created for immigrant businesses over the past decade. Here the organisations writ large and by virtue of their composition and mission they function as cultural liaisons, linking immigrant businesses to a market and customers.

Community actors unaffiliated with just one organisation can function as cultural liaisons. A business services professional describes the convening role of a local Mexican businessman:

He is great and very well known in the community and that's a kind of like central hub for information and he is very much a kind of wayfinder and I know him and he knows me, and so he reaches out to me when someone has a problem. And I also reached out to him when I was like starting to do this small business stuff.

Although liaisons frequently operate out of a public or nonprofit setting, they also serve as conduits for for-profit ventures. Multiservice centres and stores within Latin American neighbourhoods that cash checks, send remittances, prepare taxes, and file business registration and reporting paperwork, for instance, host cultural liaisons. A leader from a Philadelphia nonprofit organisation offering loans and capacity-building for emerging entrepreneurs notes:

That's who they [entrepreneurs] trust in the community because those individuals and companies are embedded...they trust that individual and that individual speaks their language, looks like them, knows they can interpret for them.

The example highlights the reality that entrepreneurs, particularly when starting out, need streamlined access to financial services. Multiservice centres can fulfil this need by offering services by representative community members from a convenient and trusted location. Participants from nonprofits noted their frustration that entrepreneurs spent precious resources at multiservice centres when free or low-cost services are available, yet acknowledged the barriers when services are located

outside of the community by an unfamiliar entity like a government or a nonprofit programme. Yet the attractions of trust, convenience, and ease of use of financial services are compelling among Latin American immigrants even when multiservice products are subpar or even predatory (Bullock, et al., 2020; Northwood & Rhine, 2018; Rojas, 2010).

13.4.2 *Trusted Communicators*

Across the cases, cultural liaisons describe their role in mitigating fear of government-sponsored financing and fostering calm through the provision of information and sustained discussion with entrepreneurs. The observations of a nonprofit lender with clients in Wake County, a limited sanctuary jurisdiction, are typical:

We have people, you know, in the middle of loan transactions and...they will say, I don't want to continue. When anything happens, you know, when things start going crazy [with the busyness of the loan], we have people saying, I don't want the loan anymore, because they think that I'm going to have their information and somehow that information is going to get somewhere and that they [the government] is going to be able to find them....we also like to tell people that they do need to run a legal business. That you do not need to have citizenship to register a business and to pay taxes. And so I think when we say that, you kind of break the ice, a little bit, but it takes a conversation together.

The comments reveal the back-and-forth discussion liaisons facilitate across the process of applying for a loan. They also underscore the anxiety around immigration status that some entrepreneurs experience and the key role liaisons play in communicating relevant and timely information addressing these concerns. Shared conversation over the course of the process is viewed as essential to encouraging entrepreneurs to advance the loan application.

In Philadelphia, a robust sanctuary county, a nonprofit lender describes the incremental steps her Latinx-serving Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) takes to build trust among Mexican and Central American small business owners, given an aversion to debt exacerbated by a perception that city agency staff are intolerant of owners who do not speak English:

They don't trust financial institutions or banks. And that's the initial barrier. It's what we try to break, so we offer in my department, we can do loans up to \$25,000, so it's typically a very small, like a micro loan. It could be \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000, so it's usually a smaller loan, in other cases. What I've seen is that once they are our clients, then they tell you, 'Oh, my goal is to buy my building or my goal is to expand my business' and then you can see that the \$1,200 or \$2,400 loan is [not enough]—what they need is \$150K.

This CDFI has created a flexible approach to lending to first-time clients, offering a range of loans facilitated by multicultural staff from their headquarters in a majority Spanish-speaking neighbourhood. They understand that borrowers may approach the institution with trepidation and therefore create products to attract and build trust among entrepreneurs with a range of income profiles and timelines using

cultural liaison staff to explain processes clearly and dispel fear (Bullock et al., 2020; Rojas, 2010).

13.4.3 Critics of Underinvestment, Inadequate Resources, Overburdened Staff

A common theme across cases is the paucity of multilingual and multicultural staff who function as cultural liaisons deployed to resource Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs. This may be due to lack of financial resources to hire adequate numbers of staff or a lack of will.

The comments of a consultant at a business-supporting public agency located in Maricopa County are representative:

The criticism has been that there's not enough Spanish-speaking programming for those entrepreneurs and even with my organisation we have no one on our team that speaks Spanish. We have a team of 22 people, I believe. Now I am the only Hispanic. And then we have two other people who are not White. So we don't represent our community. And so when I'm with the Hispanic Chamber, they're like, why would we come to you because you don't have people that look like us? And that's a criticism I have a lot.

The participant's comments suggest that lack of representation diminishes trust that status information is safe and immigrant entrepreneurs are respected when engaging with this government-sponsored entity dedicated to small business development. Given the acceleration of small businesses operated by Latin Americans, the gap in services and provision of the skills cultural liaisons can provide is short-sighted if not discriminatory.

While the previous comments are made in a limited sanctuary county in a region plagued by institutionalised racism and previous bans on the use of Spanish (Cashman, 2009), participants in robust sanctuary jurisdictions make similar observations. The leader of a nonprofit business association dedicated to supporting Latin American entrepreneurs in Philadelphia notes:

We have provided professional services, photographers, accountants, marketing, websites, in an attempt to say, look, we really are here for you. But it is so labour intensive...you need an army of people out there.

These comments underscore the array of services that cultural liaisons could offer as they develop relationships and understand the goals of entrepreneurs alongside the practical constraints due to gaps in personnel.

The participant goes on to comment upon the severe impact the local Latin American population's bifurcation between two neighbourhoods creates, noting:

When resources are assigned, typically the Commerce Department will say, 'We'll have one person for the Latino community.' Invariably, all the resources gravitate to North Philadelphia because that's where the institutional stakeholders are, that's where the majority of people live, that's where the history of the relationships are. And then that person

invariably ends up spending little time in South Philadelphia, and the Mexican community ends up being a stepchild. Like, oh, we forgot about them, we need to go and call them.

When the city allocates resources assuming that one cultural liaison is adequate for coverage, it misses the realities of the residential and commercial patterns of the community. Too few personnel are deployed to address the business needs of diverse Latin American populations across the city.

Some participants explicitly faulted public agencies for inadequate prioritisation of the resources required to fund outreach to and support of Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs. As an organiser with a network of Mexican entrepreneurs and business leaders across North Carolina and with projects in Wake County observes:

Public institutes, they don't want to put dollars into an investment. They think that by approaching a different population, it would take only, bring somebody as a volunteer, or bring somebody as a part timer who speaks half Spanish. Or create a flyer in Spanish and put a number that the person is going to answer the phone, that is a native Spanish speaker.

Attempting to conduct business support services 'on the cheap' without investment into the skills cultural liaisons provide is guided either out of unintentional or wilful ignorance. This critique dovetails with perceptions that government expects community agencies that function as cultural liaisons to provide services without adequate compensation. A nonprofit leader in Franklin County cites the example of Covid-19 when the locality needed support with Spanish-language translation:

They wanted everything for free and that's another part to it as well, I think that is another institutionalised discrimination that is happening in Franklin County. We as a nonprofit were being placed into situations where we have to deal with situations that we shouldn't be dealing with. For Covid-19, there was no communication at all in Spanish, so we took the leadership... We didn't get paid for that. There wasn't a contract. We just did it because we needed to have the responsibility to our community.

The leader resents what he perceives to be an abusive behaviour of public officials towards the cultural liaisons positioned to communicate with the local Spanish-speaking community. He considers his nonprofit's work as a trustworthy cultural liaison to be essential in communicating health and safety information to the public, in addition to guidelines by which small businesses had to comply. The comments reflect perceptions of a lack of investment in or appreciation for multicultural services even by jurisdictions with a rhetorically welcoming attitude towards Latin American immigrants.

13.4.4 Culturally-Skillful Practitioners

Cultural liaisons employ strategies they know to be effective among Mexican and Central American immigrant communities to foster trust and support entrepreneurs. One approach is committing to build personal relationships over time. When explaining how she initially developed her client lending portfolio at a

federally-supported business training agency, a community organiser and consultant in Franklin County comments:

For the first month as I was setting up the office, I was just walking around...I taught English on weekends for a little while and so I got to know a lot of the immigrants there and I was just getting out there. It was very grassroots, just meeting people one by one, gaining their trust. And you know, in our community, the second you trust somebody, you pass that information on to everyone and their mother. And so that's what I've been lucky enough with, that people have trusted me...It was just consistently getting out in the community.

Once the participant invested time and established trust, her network was solidified: word spread of the opportunities she offered, and contacts sent her community members interested in launching formal businesses.

Understanding the importance of face-to-face interaction with Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs is another strategy. A Mexican American nonprofit lender in Franklin notes:

I'm only able to gather what needs they have from actually being able to see them in person. So, that is a big need that they have, they do not like talking to you on the phone. They do not like Zoom. They feel highly disrespected and offended if you even suggest not seeing them in person.

The observations underscore the value of interpersonal engagement and a commitment to incorporating the time required to develop trust that this liaison understands and incorporates into his practice.

Recognising the cultural value of family and community, a Mexican American nonprofit leader in Maricopa County describes her approach:

I stress that, I want people to feel like they're at home like we're a *familia*, family. That's a big thing to me. You know my door is always open. If you want to come in and you have an idea that we haven't thought of your idea may work better than ours, I don't know, but come in and talk to me about it, my door's open, my phone, call me anytime, I'm not better than anyone. And I'm a firm believer in that, it's like I'm not better than anyone and no one is better than I am.

An emphasis on personal closeness and togetherness undergirds the liaison's approach to collaboration with entrepreneurs. She is attentive to equity of relationship, which may be particularly important to immigrants navigating a new business ecosystem that may be hierarchical and inaccessible.

Cultural liaisons integrate their awareness of concerns around deportation and family separation present in the Mexican and Central American immigrant communities as they consult on and promote business opportunities. When explaining her communication style with immigrant entrepreneurs, a community organiser and consultant in Franklin County comments:

And I've also been very clear. When they've walked into the [agency] I always have my little spiel about, 'I don't care. I'm going to ask you about your immigration status. It's not going to go on any record.' I always have my spiel that I needed to know so that I knew how I could support them because I wouldn't be offering them bank loans knowing that they would never qualify. And so we would walk through like, I also gave them my spiel on, 'Cool. You don't have papers. That doesn't mean you don't get to pay taxes here. So you get to pay taxes. You get to be a solid citizen because we don't know what the future holds, and

what if that's the one thing that prohibits you from getting papers in the future? So pay your taxes.' And I would walk them through it, get their ITIN [Individual Taxpayer Identification Number].

The liaison adopts a frank approach along with an awareness of the documentation concerns many Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs bring to the conversation. By introducing these concerns, in Spanish, the liaison can address attendant issues and help move clients towards their business development plans that may ultimately also serve their documentation goals.

Skilled liaisons understand the diversity of the Latin American demographic, challenging the myth that there is a monolithic Latinx culture. When invited to cite examples of effective practices to conduct outreach on commercial financial services, a nonprofit lending leader in Philadelphia describes the strategy to disaggregate depending upon the country of origin:

We don't have a lot of Mexican clients. Historically, I think, it's a community that's very reserved and maybe other countries, like I'm from the Dominican Republic, or maybe clients from Puerto Rico, they're more open to necessarily collaborate, but there's a level of trust that is very easy to establish with them than with the Mexican community. What we've noticed is that sometimes it takes a Mexican person, a Mexican lender or somebody providing technical assistance from that community to make that connection.

The commentary reinforces the importance of disaggregating the Latin American immigrant community and understanding the great diversity of identities across countries of origin, race, language, and class. Cultural liaisons bring insight into the recruitment and development of entrepreneurs across a diversity of identities.

13.4.5 Default Contacts

Entrepreneurs come to recognise and know the cultural liaison representing business opportunities rather than the agency. This phenomenon was consistent across all four case studies. Once entrepreneurs have developed rapport and trust of cultural liaisons, they may call on them for supports beyond their formal job descriptions. A Columbus city government employee describes the ways her work as a liaison spills over into areas beyond her expertise, noting:

A big part of this work is based on personal relationships and not so much on structure. And I was just explaining this to someone earlier. It's like I'm now an expert on building and zoning permits because people know me. Even though they speak English fairly well, they can read the form. They will come through me and say, 'Hey, I need to submit this thing and I don't understand.' So I'm like, 'I don't know either, but let me go ask them.' And then I ask, and then I come back. So now it's like, 'Okay, I don't want to be the gatekeeper of this relation. You should be able to [handle] this building zoning.'

While the liaison does not describe the work as a burden, she highlights that the relationship supersedes structures meant to manage the concerns of entrepreneurs. In this case, in spite of the existence of government structure designed to handle permits, the cultural liaison fields related questions. She articulates a desire for the

entrepreneur to have the capacity to manage their needs but expresses some ambivalence about the likelihood this will occur.

Entrepreneurs may identify with the person who has provided assistance, not with the appropriate organisation itself, and return to the liaison for help whether or not they correspond to the liaison's job. For instance, a nonprofit business developer and community organiser in Franklin County reflects on the way people remember her:

They may not even remember [organisation name], but they will remember me. And they may not even remember what we talked about, but they may remember, 'Oh, yeah, she did this. She gave us this. She gave us this resource and that resource.' And that helps out quite a bit.

Examples of each of the cases reinforce the sense that Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs remember the individual introducing useful information or tools rather than the sponsoring agency. The downside of this reality is that the reliance on liaisons prevents institutions from making wholesale changes to programming that supports immigrant integration (Everitt & Levinson, 2016).

13.5 Discussion

Interviews underscore the critical work of cultural liaisons in the cultivation of trust and provision of services to Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs via relationship-building, clear and targeted communication, and culturally-responsive methods. Their communication and services incorporate attentiveness to community concerns around legal status that impact entrepreneurs' willingness and ability to develop businesses. Cultural liaisons are becoming integrated into the staffing of related agencies, creating homegrown experts, expanding representation, and enhancing access to Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs. Yet there is uneven commitment and capacity among agencies to invest in these positions for meaningful outcomes.

Across the four cases, the strategies employed by cultural liaisons are characterised by an attitude of accompaniment. Kristin Yarris (2021) describes accompaniment in the context of the U.S. legal system as the intention of community members 'to use their relative privileges to ameliorate the fear, uncertainty, and precarity produced by the illegality industry.' This may take the form of assistance in communication with immigration court, presence at court appearances and ICE check-ins, support in identifying affordable legal services, connections to social services, and moral support as immigrants interact with multiple institutions. It is reflected in the practice of grassroots immigrant rights organisations operating in the contemporary U.S. context (New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, n.d.).

Cultural liaisons bridging entrepreneurs with public and private institutions exhibit the attitude of accompaniment. They demonstrate solidarity, recognise the structural barriers facing newcomers, and identify the value of successful

entrepreneurship for the larger Latin American immigrant community. Using their relative privilege as organisational staff or volunteers with experience negotiating multi-scalar commercial and legal ecosystems, they facilitate access. Their approach builds trust as demonstrated by entrepreneurs' use of their services and skills. In some cases, they use their relative privilege to push back on systems that are closed to Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs as a result of language, education, race, ethnicity, or legal status.

Cultural liaisons operate in each of the cases using similar techniques. What is distinctive is the local reality they navigate. For example, in newer immigrant gateways like Franklin and Wake Counties, Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs may have fewer organisations to which to turn for multicultural supports due to the relative number of established community members embedded in agencies (Roth & Grace, 2018). Across sanctuary jurisdictions, liaisons recognise that developing trust with entrepreneurs requires investment and cultural responsiveness as they navigate a multi-scalar environment in which local sanctuary choices, state regulations on issues like drivers' licenses, and federal immigration policy together inform entrepreneurs' business choices. They recognise the contours and constraints of sanctuary policy within the local context, advising entrepreneurs and negotiating fraught spaces as they become what Ashley Houston et al. (2023) refer to as 'everyday actors of sanctuary.' Much as a category of immigrant small businesspersons has been dubbed 'opportunity entrepreneurs' by virtue of their motivation to create business from conditions they perceive as opportunity rather than necessity, cultural liaisons can function as accomplices to opportunity by identifying and communicating opportunity for business development across sanctuary and non-sanctuary types (Fairlie et al., 2019).

Cultural liaisons possess the skills and insights to accompany entrepreneurs through the process of developing and sustaining a business. Yet they need investment from public and private agencies along with capacity-building opportunities across sanctuary types to achieve success. Hiring one member of the Latinx community does not translate into immediate reception and success in the community. Yet when entrepreneurs learn of successes of their peers, they take advantage of trusted liaisons—the very trust sanctuary jurisdictions are intended to promote. Liaisons operate across sanctuary and non-sanctuary types as immigrants inhabit a variety of geographical spaces—some amenable or accustomed to newcomers and others not—across the United States. Irrespective of sanctuary regime, cultural liaisons can function as a tool of inclusion and safety when they know the subtleties of the local ecosystem.

13.6 Conclusion

Exploring the work of cultural liaisons in support of Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurship in sanctuary and non-sanctuary jurisdictions offers insight into the interplay of multi-scalar phenomena on implicated communities.

Moreover, it illustrates some of the practical limitations of sanctuary for Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs: in both sanctuary and non-sanctuary locales, cultural liaisons operate within the multi-scalar contexts they inhabit to link entrepreneurs to available resources and build trust in formal business systems using strategies of accompaniment. Understanding the work of cultural liaisons across both sanctuary and non-sanctuary jurisdictions more deeply could advance existing local efforts to promote entrepreneurship and immigrant integration as it looks beyond sanctuary status to explore other avenues for immigrant entrepreneurship. Interviews suggest opportunities for new research to inform resource provision, programming, and methods for private and public agencies to adopt or reinforce.

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