

## Safe movement of young people

# POSITION PAPER

## Engagement and contribution of local authorities for safe mobility for migrant children and youth



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International

### INTRODUCTION

Migration flows are increasing due to crises (climate change, conflicts, poverty) that undermine livelihoods, pushing many children and youth to migrate in search of essential opportunities.

Cities and transit areas, already struggling with limited public services, experience significant pressure, sometimes fueling anti-migrant sentiment that threatens social cohesion and complicates the integration of migrant children and youth (MCY).

This situation calls on local authorities, who are responsible for protecting the fundamental rights of all, including children on the move. Their role is crucial in preventing early mobility, promoting inclusive local development, and ensuring an environment where every child or young person can grow and contribute to the community.

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments, as decentralized arms of the State, are guarantors of human rights, especially for vulnerable populations such as migrant children and youth.

They must create conditions that protect dignity, resilience, and fundamental rights by facilitating access to social services, education, health, and protection.

They are obligated to integrate the needs and issues of children and youth, including migrants, into local development plans and budgets using a participatory, human rights-sensitive approach.

This role also includes establishing partnerships with specialized organizations to offer adapted solutions, build inclusive environments, and allow migrant children and youth to define their life paths within a protective, rights-based framework.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENTS STRUGGLING TO FULFILL THEIR MANDATE

In many West and North African countries, decentralization remains fragile. Local governments lack capacities, resources, and institutional anchoring to effectively respond to the needs of vulnerable populations.

Migrant children and youth suffer from marginalization, discrimination, stigmatization, insecurity, and degrading treatment in several transit or destination areas, exacerbated by weak engagement of local authorities.

This lack of involvement contributes both to mobility (in departure areas where opportunities and protection are lacking) and to increased vulnerability in host areas, where children sometimes face violent pushbacks or repression.

The voices of local governments must become louder in response to the suffering of migrant children and youth; solidarity must prevail over indifference.

## LOCAL AUTHORITIES' ENGAGEMENT: A LEVER AGAINST STIGMATIZATION

For the engaged children and youth of MAEJT, the active involvement of local authorities is essential. Their leadership can foster peaceful coexistence, dismantle prejudices, support educational and social initiatives, and create protective spaces.

By integrating the concerns of Migrant Children and Youth into local development strategies, local authorities contribute to strengthening inclusion, preventing social tensions, and promoting social harmony.

Migrant Children and Youth represent valuable potential for local development; facilitating their access to basic services and removing social barriers support their integration and strengthen community cohesion

## PROMISING LOCAL INITIATIVES TO BUILD ON

Several community-based approaches are emerging in departure areas, often led by individuals with migration experience. These initiatives generate local economic activities to help young people stay and avoid dangerous departures.

In transit or destination areas, some local governments have introduced:

- \* community spaces for reception and socio-educational support of MCY;
- \* alternative educational opportunities (literacy, accelerated learning, vocational training) tailored to the needs and realities of these young people;
- \* planning and budgeting mechanisms sensitive to human rights, ensuring children and youth are included in local priorities.

These experiences demonstrate the potential of structured and sustainable local engagement to strengthen the resilience of Migrant Children and Youth and facilitate their integration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the contribution of local governments to the well-being and protection of migrant children and youth, it is recommended to:

1. Address rising anti-migrant sentiment through public statements, awareness campaigns, and policies that promote inclusion and diversity.
2. Raise community awareness to change negative perceptions of specific categories of Migrant Children and Youth (girls, children in street situations, working adolescent girls), emphasizing their dignity and aspirations.
3. Integrate a rights-based approach into local planning and budgeting (participatory processes sensitive to the rights of children and youth).
4. Adapt local public services to account for the cultural, social, and ethnic diversity of residents, including migrant populations.
5. Strengthen or establish psychosocial support services for Migrant Children and Youth in partnership with competent organizations.
6. Intensify community mobilization to prevent prejudice, promote peaceful coexistence, and strengthen peace in transit and destination zones.

