

International Workshop **Cities on the Frontline: Protecting Migrants in Times of Transboundary Crises**

February 26 & 27, 2026

Universitat Pompeu Fabra – Barcelona

Introduction

In an era where crises are increasingly the “new normal,” cities have emerged as key actors in shaping responses to social vulnerabilities. Pandemics, climate shocks, economic downturns, and geopolitical upheavals do not stop at national borders, yet their consequences are profoundly felt in urban settings. Among the most affected are (forced) migrants, who face compounded vulnerabilities due to poverty, gender, administrative status, stigmatization, limited access to basic services, among others. This workshop invites scholars and practitioners to critically engage with the role of cities in protecting migrant populations during crises.

Cities are not only spaces where the impacts of crises unfold but also active governance actors with growing autonomy and interconnectedness, where state and non-state actors interact. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, cities were confronted with the urgent task of addressing the needs of irregular migrants, temporary workers, and asylum seekers under strict mobility restrictions and economic shutdowns. From smaller or declining cities to global hubs like Madrid, New York, São Paulo, and Bangkok, local authorities and actors operating at the local level continually face questions of crisis preparedness and resilience: How can they mobilize resources, institutional capacity, and policy innovation to mitigate the vulnerabilities of migrant populations? What mechanisms of cooperation and learning can strengthen their role as first responders?

This workshop is grounded in insights from two interrelated projects funded by the State Research Agency: MunMigra, which investigates how Spanish cities responded to precarious migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic, and GlocalMIC, which explores crisis preparedness in responding to migrants in global cities. Together, these projects advance an emerging research agenda on local governance, crisis management, and the protection of vulnerable migrant groups.

Workshop objectives

This workshop seeks to:

1. Examine how local governments respond to migrants in times of crisis, from emergency measures to longer-term resilience strategies.
2. Compare cases across local, national, and transnational levels, exploring both municipal practices and global city networks.

3. Interrogate the governance dynamics that enable or hinder preparedness – such as multi-level coordination, inter-city cooperation, and the role of civil society and private actors.

4. Advance a research and policy agenda on migrant protection that places

Venue

All plenary and parallel sessions will take place at the Mercè Rodoreda Building, Ciutadella Campus, Universitat Pompeu Fabra:

- Main sessions: Mercè Rodoreda Auditorium (Building No. 23)
- Parallel session (Panel 3, Part B): Room 23.S03 (Building No. 23)

Workshop conveners

Juan Carlos Triviño-Salazar & Juliana Fornasier (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

Acknowledgements

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Final programme

Day 1 - February 26th

09:00 – 09:15	Opening
09:15 – 11:00 Panel 1	<p>Migration governance and policy implementation <i>Chair: Jelle Willem van der Wal</i> <i>Discussant: Carlos Delclos</i></p> <p><u>Elvis Ng'andwe (Hochschule Fulda)</u> “Frontline Cities, Fragile Regions: How Kampala and Nairobi Protect Refugees During Transboundary Crises”</p> <p><u>Louise Hantson (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)</u> Governing Migration at the Margins: Integration Politics in Catalonia’s Non-Urban Spaces</p> <p><u>Rafik Arfaoui (University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, UMR EVS)</u> Small Towns and Refugee Reception in France: Beyond the Local Turn, Between Spatial Diversity and Plural Local Actions</p> <p><u>Dr. Jannatul Ferdous (Comilla University) (online)</u> “Cities on the Edge: Protecting Migrant Communities in Times of Crisis – Lessons from Global South Governance”</p>
11:00 – 11:20	Coffee break
11:20 – 13:05 Panel 2	<p>The role of different actors in responding to migration challenges <i>Chair: Michail-Chrysovalantis Markodimitrakis</i> <i>Discussant: Rafik Arfaoui</i></p> <p><u>Fedor Zolotarev (University of Pécs)</u> Urban Networks and Migration Corridors: Russian and Ukrainian Cities in the Aftermath of the 2022 Crisis</p> <p><u>David Rodríguez Seoane (University of Barcelona)</u> Strategic Alliances in Times of Crisis. NGOs and their access to decision-making spaces in the governance of migration peak events in Spain</p>

	<p><u>Minjae Shin (University of Bristol)</u> Negotiating Hierarchies of Deservingness: Nationalism, Urban Governance, and Migrant Protection in South Korea</p>
13:05 – 14:30	Lunch
14:30 – 15:00	Presentation of the MunMigra & GLOCALMIC projects <i>Juan Carlos Triviño Salazar</i>
15:00 – 16:45 Panel 3 (Part A)	<p>Institutional arrangements and framings <i>Chair: Alice Gaya</i> <i>Discussant: Jacqueline Broadhead</i></p> <p><u>Çağla Ekin Güner (Central European University)</u> Institutional Solidarity with Refugees: Urban Integration Governance in Hamburg and Izmir</p> <p><u>Gabriel Blouin-Genest (University of Sherbrooke)</u> Assessing social polarization in relation to climate migration: the case of Québec (Canada) medium sized cities</p> <p><u>Corina Lacatus (Queen Mary University of London)</u> “Hands-off Orchestration: Border security and the governance of irregular migrant care in the Canary Islands”</p>
15:00 – 16:45 Panel 3 (Part B) Room 23.S03	<p>Institutional arrangements and framings <i>Chair: Demetra Santagati</i> <i>Discussant: Francisco Ferraioli</i></p> <p><u>Jelle Willem van der Wal (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)</u> Street-Level Policy Entrepreneurship in Migration Policy Design</p> <p><u>Juliana Fornasier (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)</u> Policy Learning in Local Migration Governance? A Comparative Study of Fuenlabrada (Spain) and Ghent (Belgium)</p>

	<p><u>Ahmed Jemaa (University of Osnabrück & University of Sousse)</u> Agadir Beyond the Route: Migration Governance and Urban Agency in Southern Morocco</p> <p><u>Michail-Chrysovalantis Markodimitrakis (Hellenic Mediterranean University)</u> Cities of Hospitality and Exclusion: Governing Migration and Tourism in Crete and Gavdos</p>
16:45 – 17:05	Coffee Break
17:05 – 18:50	<p><u>Roundtable with practitioners: “Including Migrants in Urban Crisis and Resilience Frameworks: Experiences in European cities”</u></p> <p><i>Evi Voet</i>, Coordinator of the Asylum and Refugee Team at the City of Ghent</p> <p><i>Gloria Rendon</i>, Policy Expert and Researcher in Migration and Urban Governance</p> <p><i>Inti Bertocchi</i>, Public servant at the Municipality of Bologna, Researcher at Universidad Politecnica de Madrid</p> <p>Moderated by: <i>Juan Carlos Triviño Salazar</i></p>

Day 2 - February 27th

<p>09:15 – 11:00 Panel 4</p>	<p>Migrants’ experiences and agency <i>Chair: Francisco Ferraioli</i> <i>Discussant: Prof. Dr Kerstin Rosenow-Williams</i></p> <p><u>Julieta Lechini Vittorino & Carlos Delclos (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)</u> Staying Power: Cooperative Housing and Migrant Capabilities in the Face of Urban Displacement</p> <p><u>Alice Gaya (University of Oxford)</u> Seeking Safety: Displaced Women and Their Search for Shelter in Greece</p>
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	<p><u>Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen (Aalborg University)</u> Intersectionality and Sanctuary in Times of Crisis: The Case of Mexico City</p>
11:00 – 11:20	Coffee break
11:20 – 12:45 Panel 5	<p>Cities’ resilience and consolidation of lessons learned <i>Chair: Corina Lacatus</i> <i>Discussant: Gabriel Blouin Genest</i></p> <p><u>Demetra Santagati (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)</u> Towards an Urban Resilience and Migration Governance Index: Assessing Cities’ Capacities Across the Mediterranean</p> <p><u>Jacqueline Broadhead & Lucy Leon (University of Oxford)</u> Understanding the impact of crisis mobilisations for newcomers from Hong Kong, Ukraine and Afghanistan on the capacity of UK local authorities</p> <p><u>Kerstin Rosenow-Williams & Alina Bergedieck (University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg)</u> Frontline Municipalities under Pressure: Sustaining Professionalisation and Gender-Sensitive Resilience in Local Refugee Governance</p>
12:45 – 13:00	Closing remarks & farewell

Logistics

The Mercè Rodoreda Auditorium (as well as Room 23.S03), where the workshop will take place, is located inside the Mercè Rodoreda Building (Building number 23 & 24) on the UPF Ciutadella Campus.