In preparation for the 4th Annual Peer-to-Peer Learning Workshop of the Mediterranean Host Municipalities Learning Network (HMLN) and to answer the new learning needs of HMLN members in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) and World Bank in collaboration with partners are organizing a series of 3 technical online training workshops. The online series will provide representatives of central and local authorities and development partners an opportunity to learn from current experiences and active collaborations for stronger job creation and private sector engagement in contexts characterized by forced displacement, and an exchange on challenges deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic and current measures to counter the sanitary crisis and its spillovers on local economies.

The first session of the series was held on May 27th and focused on “Fostering employment and entrepreneurship for locals and refugees: new challenges from COVID-19 crisis for host local authorities”. This document presents:

- Summary of main takeaways from the event
- Detailed summary of speakers’ presentations and interventions.
- Overview of live poll results and open discussions including municipal suggestions and solutions to support business creation and operation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

The second online event of this series will take place on Wednesday, June 17th with another session on COVID-19 and how municipalities can face the new economic and sanitary challenges, more examples from municipalities, and technical presentations on job creation in the context of displacement and COVID-19. The workshop session also includes a focus on financial services in times of crisis and employment support for youth, women and displaced.

The training series will end with a last online event on Wednesday, July 8th with a focus on how to engage and support the private sector, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

A certificate of participation will be awarded to all those who successfully attend the three events of this series.

This Online Training Workshop Series is part of the knowledge exchange and learning request of the Host Municipality Learning Network. It is organized by the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) and the World Bank Group in collaboration with Agence Française du Développement (AFD), Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Cities Local Governments – Middle East West Asia (UCLG-
Main takeaways of workshop discussion

This first online workshop of the training series gathered together 131 representatives of local authorities and development organizations to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, challenges and responses from local authorities, and to present ways in which local authorities can contribute to foster business creation for local and displaced populations living in their areas.

The following points were raised during presentations and open discussions:

- **The COVID-19 pandemic and related movement restrictions posed new challenges for local economies**, especially for managing municipal budget and operations, and for the sustainability of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMSEs). These challenges are particularly felt by migrant and refugee groups, as well as women-led businesses. Despite a joint understanding on the needs of supporting women and small businesses in times of lockdown and economic downturn, the realization that many local businesses are about to go bankrupt and the fact that municipal development projects are at a halt because of lockdown measures and new emergency priorities, leads to the question of how municipalities can assist marginalized groups such as vulnerable refugees, women and youth and support SMSEs at the same time.

- **Local authorities play a critical role in responding to the crisis and supporting communities and ask for increased technical support and training on crisis and post-crisis management for mitigating the consequences of the pandemic and relaunching the local economy.** Municipalities are the first point of contact with the communities, they understand their needs, and can play a key role in supporting them and local businesses. International organizations and development partners can support local authorities through municipal needs assessment and analysis to develop local solutions, and by helping channeling emergency funding and sharing information on possible municipal funding.

- **Despite challenges, the crisis can also represent an opportunity to rethink municipal strategic objectives and open new sectors of the local economy.** Production and export of basic goods can be further developed and encouraged, especially in those towns that used to rely on sectors most hit by the crisis, such as the tourism sector or sectors relying on seasonal migration. The revival of the local economy can also be supported by local authorities through public-private dialogues, inclusive public procurements targeted to local SMEs and support to employers part of vulnerable groups. This would lead to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the local economy while at the same time reviving the local business environment, as women employers tend to hire other women, and refugee employers tend to hire other refugees, generating a multiplier effect to increase employment. This could be done, for instance, in form of municipal partnerships with businesses managed by vulnerable groups, or direct support to those businesses.

- **Continuation of municipal measures targeting social cohesion and promotion of solidarity are of high importance.** Local authorities should focus on making services and economic
opportunities accessible to all, and showcasing that support is available to all communities, ensuring that local policies and actions are mutually beneficial for the short and long term.

- **Local authorities are already proactive in responding to the crisis, supporting local businesses and protecting vulnerable groups.** They are showing great resilience and capacity to adapt to the crisis context, including through developing solutions targeting the local private sector, including refugee-owned businesses. This is also shown by the many suggestions for actions to revive and stimulate the business environment being inclusive of displaced populations that municipalities reported during this webinar, as described below in this report. A collection of municipal responses to the COVID-19 crisis is available at [this page](#) and continuously updated by the CMI.

- **Information sharing, knowledge exchange and peer to peer learning is essential in light of the ongoing crisis.** Encouraging and promoting learning about different local responses to the COVID-19 and their preliminary results can help inform solutions and ways forward.

### Detailed summary of Workshop presentations

*All speakers’ presentations are available [here](#)*

**Blanca Moreno-Dodson,** Manager of the Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) and **Saroj Kumar Jha,** Regional Director, Middle East Department, World Bank, opened the online event by highlighting the new situation local authorities are facing with the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasizing that the World Bank and the CMI stand ready to support local authorities during these times. Mrs. Moreno-Dodson recognized the added challenges faced by local authorities and the need to support them. She remarked how the Host Municipalities Learning Network, managed by CMI since 2016, has grown in content and membership and mentioned that municipal staff and representatives are now finding themselves at the forefront of the COVID-19 crisis, which adds up on already existing challenges deriving from hosting refugees and displaced populations. Mrs. Moreno-Dodson also remarked the need to find innovative ways to finance municipal projects for local and displaced populations, and to help municipalities support entrepreneurs at the microlevel. Finally, she noted that the complementarity in the work of CMI and World Bank can help facilitate the dialogue and knowledge exchange between central and local governments, where information sharing and learning in obtaining funding opportunities and designing response plans is crucial. Mr. Jha started his opening by highlighting the importance of nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship to stimulate private sector jobs, which was a priority for host local authorities and governments also before the current COVID-19 crisis. He also remarked the need to have a Whole-of-Community approach in policy measures that include all segments of the population including the displaced, alongside with implementing a health response, expanding safety net programs, guarantee firm-level resilience and credit lines for SMSEs and ensuring a rebound in the economy once the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis will be over. This can be done by reaching new markets and producing new products, for instance, by strengthening the production and export of medical goods as it is happening in Jordan and Lebanon.

**Giulia Marchesini,** Senior Partnership Officer, CMI, started the first session of the day by presenting insights on the new challenges and priorities for local authorities in the ongoing COVID-19 crisis collected through a rapid needs assessment performed by the CMI, prior the event. Mrs. Marchesini reported that local authorities are undertaking actions beyond their mandate, representing a first challenge in an
already strained situation of lack of human resources and infrastructure. She further reported the need for training and guidance on how to implement an emergency plan and crisis response, how to manage the municipal budget remotely, and improving the digital infrastructure, e.g. through digital financial services, e-wallets as well as and training of municipal staff. The CMI is continuing to receive information on needs and actions from HMLN members and are compiling them on the CMI website, for peer-to-peer exchange and informing development partner’s programs. **A detailed review of the CMI needs assessment on challenges and priorities for local authorities is available here.**

Mohammad Abu Gaoud, Head of Local Development Unit of Greater Madaba municipality, Jordan, and Nadine Burbar, Head of Local Economic Development, Ramallah Municipality, Palestine, shared their experience in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Both municipal examples showed quick responses involving initial sanitization of public areas, online information campaigns, setting up an emergency team, and training of staff. They showcased the importance of local authorities’ quick and responsive actions in supporting local communities including local businesses, deriving from the need to make cities immune to these unexpected crises strengthening their readiness to adapt.

Mrs. Burbar reported how Ramallah Municipality built on its 2017 Urban Resilience Strategy to manage the crisis. Its response focused on digitalizing services to map-out the spread of COVID-19 and improving online information sharing with its residents. In particular, the municipality set priorities in collaboration with the municipal council and emergency service council, choosing to focus on providing health services, waste and medical waste services, cleaning services as well as maintaining educational and cultural activities turning them in an online format as much as possible to respect social distancing measures.

Mr. Abu Gaoud reported how Greater Madaba Municipality engaged volunteers and youth to help provide essential services such as cleaning and disinfecting, delivering essential food to vulnerable households, and ensuring social distancing measures are implemented. In addition, Mr. Abu Gaoud explained that the pandemic was a test for Madaba’s touristic sector, a sector the Municipality greatly relies to, and allowed to reconsider the capabilities of the municipality at many levels: weaknesses in the crisis management were found, for example collaboration with civil society was challenging and the need to provide e-services and encourage small shops and small production targeted to local populations and not tourists arise.

Mauro Testaverde, Senior Economist, World Bank, presented an analysis on the importance of social protection measures for migrants during the COVID-19 crisis, and inclusion of migrants and refugees in COVID-19 responses. Mr. Testaverde reported that migrant and refugees’ groups were particularly vulnerable to the pandemics, due to their crowded living and work conditions, and were at high risk of income and job loss because they often work in jobs affected by social distancing. This also affects their families and countries of origin for whom remittances are a key source of income. Mr. Testaverde presented three set of measures able to mitigate migrant related impact of the crisis, including: i) Social safety net programs (e.g. include migrants in safety net measures, regardless of their legal status); ii) Employment retention policies (e.g. wage subsidies, extension to work permits); iii) Employment promotion policies (e.g. job matching and job search programs including migrants). Finally, he remarked that communities hosting refugees can learn from countries that include migrants in their COVID-19 responses and apply these measures to their own local context. Local governments have an important
role to play, as they can effectively target local population, fill the gaps left by federal governments and provide programs targeting the needs of migrant workers and refugees.

Meriem Ait Slimane, Senior Private Sector Specialist, World Bank, started the second session with a technical presentation on how to develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem which is inclusive of women and vulnerable populations. Mrs. Slimane remarked that investing in women-owned businesses is a win-win strategy as women are more likely to hire other women. She then showcased a number of support actions that local authorities can take to encourage entrepreneurship, especially women-led businesses: for instance, she remarked that improving local authorities’ financial and technical capacity is key and that municipalities have an important role to play, for instance by establishing a public-private dialogue, addressing issues faced locally by Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMSEs), expanding digitalization for business owners and clients, maintaining relations with foreign investors, and focusing on the most vulnerable SMSEs. For what concerns the specific COVID-19 contexts, Mrs. Slimane suggested that local authorities could focus on women entrepreneurs, digital financial services, and continue strengthening social cohesion among all residents of their towns through dialogue and mediation, as the COVID-19 crisis is likely to put pressures on social relations among locals and displaced. Finally, she remarked the importance for municipalities to streamline the regulatory framework for home-based businesses as important vehicle of self/employment among women and vulnerable groups given its low establishment and management costs and compatibility with childcare needs and social and cultural norms.

Selen Ucak, Program Director for Middle East, Building Markets, gave a presentation on refugee entrepreneurship in Turkey and its opportunities and challenges. She reported as positive outcomes an increase in employment, especially refugee employment as refugee business owners tend to hire other refugees, access to a broader export market, and increased partnerships opportunity for Turkish businesses. However, this does not come without obstacles: many refugee-owned businesses lack access to finance and means to make their business formal, and face new emerging threats linked to their vulnerability to the COVID-19 crisis and its deriving lockdown measures. Mrs. Ucak emphasized that SMSEs diversify the market and economy, attract foreign investors and create jobs and that, despite of its negative nature, the COVID-19 crisis also creates new opportunities. For instance, the increased demand for essential goods such as protective medical equipment is creating a new market for SMSEs. Finally, she informed that Building Markets is ready to help local authorities with identifying local businesses’ needs, accessing new suppliers and business matchmaking.

Fuat Ozharat, Foreign Affairs Officer of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, Turkey presented a project for job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities for Syrians under temporary protection, jointly funded by the Government of Turkey and the European Union. The project targets Syrian refugees under temporary protection and Turkish citizens with a focus on youth and women with the aim of creating economic and social resilience. Mr. Ozharat also presented some obstacles faced by Syrian-owned businesses in Gaziantep, which need assistance from authorities, such as high registration costs, access to finance, legal and social compliance and access to a skilled workforce.

Gilda Borriello, consultant for the Host Communities and Refugee program, CMI, presented the results of the live poll and open chat discussion among participating local authorities. The poll, to which 41
representatives of local authorities participated showed that a majority (58%) of respondents considered their authority well prepared to the COVID-19 crisis showing their relative resilience to this crisis, that may be explained by past shocks they encountered. Only a minority (19%) reported that businesses owned by refugees were mostly formally registered, showing the vulnerability of those businesses that are less likely to receive formal social nets and emergency support. However, respondents showed their municipalities were mostly proactive in supporting refugee-owned businesses, both before and during/after the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, participants identified a series of possible ways to support the local business environment, some of them already being implemented by them, including: favoring local goods & services supply (e.g. support local agriculture; prioritize local SMEs in public procurements); matchmaking job opportunities with available refugees/vulnerable workers; stimulate local business creation through lifting administrative and tax constraints; develop digitalization for businesses and municipal operations; provide trainings for local entrepreneurs, low-skilled refugee workers; monitor impact of the crisis on the local private sector; coordinate with all levels to deliver support to local businesses. A detailed summary of these results in provided at the bottom of this document.

Finally, Zeina El Khoury, Private Sector Specialist, World Bank, shared concluding remarks. She noted that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis is significant on everyone, on many levels, on individuals, whether local or displaced, on businesses, from micro to large, formal and informal, on public agencies, from municipalities to national central governments, from high income to low income countries. However, not all countries have the same capacity and resources, financial and non-financial to respond to this crisis and not all have the same initial or pre-existing fragilities. Local authorities are at the forefront but face many challenges, including financial. However, they showed great agility in designing local responses to the crisis. They can still play a pivotal role in responding to the crisis and supporting communities and local businesses, unfortunately often outside of their typical mandates: these actions are most unbudgeted items, and now coupled with the impact of reduced revenue, will have a considerable impact on the financial position of these local authorities and on their ability to deliver services, and to invest in the areas necessary to ensure sustainability in the future. As such, investing in strengthening the financial and technical capacity of local authorities is key and encouraging emergency preparedness is critical moving forward: they need their own adequate revenue, or smooth central transfers to mobilize funds quickly.

Annex: Detailed Summary of live poll, interactive discussion and solutions from participating municipalities

Three poll questions and an open-ended question were asked to participants at the beginning of the online event and were then presented at the end to give a complement to the discussion and reflect on municipal representatives’ views.

The majority of participants who responded to the live poll (41 representatives of local authorities) reported they were “well prepared” to the COVID-19 crisis (51%), showing the relative resilience of surveyed local authorities, who already encountered shocks in the past. Despite this positive result, almost 30% reported to be “not well prepared” and 12% were “not prepared at all”. The remaining respondents (7%) reported to be very well prepared to face the crisis.
When it comes to the local business environment, only 19% of the 41 respondents said that most of businesses owned by refugees or displaced populations are formally registered. The remaining 49% reported a mixed picture with some refugee-owned businesses formal and some informal and the 32% remaining said that most of these businesses are not registered formally. These results might indicate that, as shown by some presentations of this online event, refugees have one more layer of vulnerability in the COVID-19-related economic disruption given the informality of their business and lack of formal social security and support. On this issue, the live poll showed that most municipalities are proactive in supporting the business environment for refugees especially after the crisis: a short majority (32%) declared to have carried out business support programs for refugees / displaced both before the crisis and in response to it, while the 29% started supporting them only in response to the crisis. However, a majority (34%) of respondents said to have implemented no measure at all to support refugee-owned businesses locally, before or after the COVID-19 crisis.
In parallel to answering contextual questions in the online poll, participants were asked to answer the question “What actions would you undertake to support the local business environment after the COVID-19 crisis?“. Participants identified a series of possible ways to support the local business environment, some of them already being implemented by the local authorities, summarized as follows:

- **Ensure local goods & services supply and demand:**
  - Agriculture sector should be prioritized to prevent food supply shortage. To ensure demand and keep up local food production, local authorities can buy and distribute locally produced food, cleaning and logistics products for free to low-income and vulnerable households or to those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.
  - The infrastructure sector can also be supported by the municipality, by contracting local infrastructure and logistics businesses to improve municipal urban planning measures in line with the new lockdown regulations (e.g. pedestrian sidewalk paths).

- **Support labor supply:** Local authorities can work with international organizations, trade associations, INGOs, local associations and provincial authorities dealing with migration and refugees issues to map the vacancies in the service and infrastructure sectors and match refugees and other vulnerable groups with jobs needing workers. Refugees and vulnerable groups can be directed to the companies that operate with foreign businesses in the service sector.

- **Stimulate business creation and operationalization:**
  - Improve creation of home-based businesses through specific municipal programs to support the marginalized and poor groups.
  - Lower taxes for businesses and facilitating the granting of registration, licenses and approvals, also through digital services.
  - Strengthening social security for workers and jobseekers.
  - Providing technical support to businesses on fighting COVID-19 and strengthening OSH measures, awareness raising measures.

- **Funding & grants:**
Mediterranean Host Municipalities Learning Network – Online Training Workshop series

“Jobs, Entrepreneurship and Private Sector Engagement in Host Communities: adapting to the COVID-19 crisis”

- **Digitalization:**
  - For the local authorities: facilitate remote work for municipal employees, review the service delivery mechanism to offer digital municipal services.
  - For businesses: improve digital infrastructure for businesses, provide opportunities for electronic and easier registration procedures, create platforms for remote work managed by local authorities.

- **Training:**
  - For the local authorities: build specialized municipal human resources and improve digital literacy of municipal employees.
  - Local authorities can organize courses in partnership with the agricultural chambers, agricultural credit cooperatives, and farmers to offer supports to farmers and involving refugees in local agricultural production, which will also foster social cohesion.
  - Trainings can be organized for low-skilled refugee and migrant workers to work in the service and industry sectors, with the double aim to develop the municipal infrastructure and to reduce existing unemployment and vulnerability.
  - Training of employers and employees on digital services, for instance through a digital education platform for businesses that would offer training in crisis management, e-commerce, digital marketing, and experience sharing and collaboration opportunities among businesses.
  - Ensure awareness and application of health regulations from business owners in compliance with WHO and central governments instructions.

- **Data and planning:** carry out assessments to monitor impact of the crisis on the private sector, create a database for special group (e.g. those who lost their jobs) to reduce the impact of lockdown, and use these as input for the creation of a realistic recovery plan with the participation of all stakeholders.

- **Coordination & Networking:**
  - Coordinate with all levels (national, international, charities, education sector, private sector), for instance through a board committee coordinated by the municipality, to deliver support to local businesses.
  - Create a platform for local authorities to exchange information on funding opportunities for local authorities and best practices in private sector recovery.