

CITY DIPLOMACY DURING COVID-19

THE 2022 CITIES AND
INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT
SURVEY



THE CHICAGO
COUNCIL
ON
GLOBAL
AFFAIRS



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Melbourne Centre
for Cities



Melbourne Centre
for Cities



--

If you would like further information on the research, please contact:

Daniel Pejic
Research Fellow
Melbourne Centre for Cities
daniel.pejic@unimelb.edu.au

Baldwin Spencer Building 113
The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010 Australia.

--

The Melbourne Centre for Cities is designed to address the challenges that city leadership faces, and the information it needs, in an interconnected and increasingly urbanised planet.

The University of Melbourne actively seeks to extend linkages between education, research and practice, and aims to inspire learning through interdisciplinary reflection, and its integration of research teaching and practice around the implications of all forms of urbanisation.

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, businesses, and governments engage the world.

CITY DIPLOMACY DURING COVID-19

THE 2022 CITIES AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

1. Executive Summary	02
2. Introduction	03
3. Key Survey Findings	05
4. Conclusion	11
5. Methods	12
6. Notes	13

This research report has been developed by the Melbourne Centre for Cities at the University of Melbourne. It is intended to inform research, policy and public discussions on the present and future of cities. The authors have sought to ensure the accuracy of the material in this document, but they, the Centre, and the University of Melbourne will not be liable for any loss or damage incurred through the use of this report.

Published by Melbourne Centre for Cities, University of Melbourne, 2022.

The authors would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of Samuel Kling and Alex Hitch in reviewing and providing feedback on the survey and report. We would also like to thank the German Marshall Fund Cities Program and Eurocities for their assistance in disseminating the survey and the many city representatives and their teams who completed the questionnaire and showed interest in the work.

To cite this report: Pejic, D., Acuto, M., and Kosovac, A. 2022. 'City diplomacy during COVID-19: the 2022 cities and international engagement survey.' Melbourne Centre for Cities; Chicago Council on Global Affairs. doi: 10.26188/19719676

This report is under a Creative Commons license (Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International).



THE CHICAGO
COUNCIL
ON
GLOBAL
AFFAIRS



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Melbourne Centre
for Cities

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the previous two years, cities have been at the forefront of global attention due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on urban populations and economic activity. Most starkly we witnessed the emptying of central business districts due to extended lockdowns, followed by cautious attempts to reinvigorate city life. The pandemic has revealed and exacerbated societal fissures and dramatically reshaped the way we live, work and play within our cities. This deeply 'urban' crisis represents the backdrop of this 2022 edition of the *Cities and International Engagement Survey*.

This report presents findings of the third iteration of this global survey of the international engagement of city governments. The initial pilot study undertaken in 2018 (27 cities surveyed)¹ found a distinct lack of funding allocated to city governments to conduct diplomatic activities. The expanded sample in 2020 (47 cities surveyed)² revealed the breadth of international activities undertaken by city governments and a growing confidence in their capacity to address global issues. Despite this, there remained significant challenges for cities to maximise the value of their international engagements, including still-limited investment and few opportunities to build internal diplomatic capacity.

Since the 2020 survey, we have observed the increasing presence of city leaders on the global stage, advocating for a role in influencing global policy development in an array of issue areas including climate change, migration, economic development, culture, and of prominence recently, health. Cities have achieved greater recognition as actors with a critical role to play in meeting global goals and created a range of linkages with multilateral forums.^{3,4}

It is within this context of more globally networked multilateralism, as well as an increasingly formalised ecosystem of transnational city networks, that we present results from the 2022 survey of the international engagement activities of 59 cities globally. Some of the key findings show:

- While the COVID-19 pandemic threatened international connection in many areas, cities embraced international engagement to inform their response to the crisis. **Three-quarters engaged internationally from the outset of the pandemic, working with a diverse range of partners.** Cities looked abroad for policy inspiration, to access data and benchmark their performance, as well as to attain materials and financial support.
- Despite the impacts of the pandemic, **over 70% of cities allocated funding for international travel in the previous year, an increase of 75% from 2020.** Over two-thirds of cities funded delegations and almost three-quarters funded international conferences and events. By comparison, only 38% of cities said they allocated funding for international conferences and events in the 2020 survey.
- While cities expressed confidence in their capacity to address global challenges, they see benefits in **more engagement with national foreign affairs offices.** Most of these relations were ad hoc in nature and cities expressed support for **more formalised arrangements such as national diplomats engaging directly with city international offices** and dedicated national funding for city diplomacy.
- Overall though, **cities wanted to retain independence over their international engagements** with only 20% believing national governments should have a say in these affairs.
- **Only half of cities said that staff who conduct international activities had received relevant training for their role.** This was a slight rise from the 2020 survey. Almost two-thirds of cities agreed that they would engage more in city diplomacy if they had access to better training and capacity building on international issues.
- Individual leadership was viewed as an important factor in international city engagement, with **85% of respondents believing that the personal networks of leaders help cities achieve their international objectives.**
- Even with the seismic changes that cities experienced between 2020 and 2022, the top priority areas for international engagement remained the same as the previous report: **climate change, economic development and resilience.**

2. INTRODUCTION

— —

This study builds on two previous reports from the University of Melbourne and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The 2018 report, *Toward City Diplomacy*, presented findings from a pilot study of 27 local governments (conducted in 2017) which surveyed their capacity to network internationally. Some of the key findings from this study were:

- A majority of cities surveyed had an international strategy and a dedicated international office.
- A majority of cities were part of international city networks.
- A majority of officials said that city diplomacy had a positive impact on their cities.
- The city budget for global engagement was often minimal.
- Few cities reported that their staff had undergone dedicated training for city diplomacy.

In 2020, a second report presented findings from an expanded and refined survey which was completed by 47 local governments globally and supplemented by in-depth interviews with a senior manager for international affairs in five cities.¹ Data collection for this study concluded in late 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some of the key findings from the 2020 *Conducting City Diplomacy* report were:

- Cities and their leaders were confident in their capacity to address global challenges.
- In some areas, such as climate change mitigation, cities believed they had greater potential for impact than their national governments, particularly when acting through networks and multilateral urban programs.
- Less than half of international engagement staff in cities received any formal training for their international activities.
- Cities identified three major barriers to strengthening their diplomatic activities: 1) inadequate funding and resources; 2) insufficient training on international engagement; 3) lack of formal recognition by national and multilateral bodies.

Since the 2020 survey, cities have confronted seismic new global challenges, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on urban health and wellbeing, human migration, trade, and economic development. With strict border closures imposed in many localities and national governments exercising

crisis management powers, many geographies have seen a 'return of the state' to the centrality of discussions of national and indeed global governance.⁵ In this context, this report seeks to understand the current capabilities, methods and impacts of city diplomacy and to discern potential changes to these characteristics over time. Additionally, it aims to understand the impacts of the pandemic on the international engagement of cities and how city diplomacy has shaped the way local governments have responded to the crisis.

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

In total, 59 city governments from 33 countries completed the survey. This represented an increase in both city participants (from 47 in 2020) and nation-states represented (31 in 2020). The survey included responses from cities in all major geographic regions (figure 1). Compared to 2020, a similar number of responses were received from cities in North America (9 compared to 10) and Africa and the Middle East (6 in both iterations). Twice as many responses were received from the Asia-Pacific region (8 compared to 4), while only half as many came from South America (5 compared to 10). The decline in responses in Latin America was likely due to the survey only being available in English in this iteration (it was available in Spanish in 2020). The major change in geographic representation between the surveys was a significant increase in responses from cities in Europe (31 compared to 17). This reflected idiosyncrasies of the sampling method (see Methods). Due to the large number of European cities, the report presents some comparison between European and non-European respondents. This is to discern whether there were similarities among the responses of European cities that could skew the global results. Aside from this the report does not draw further conclusions on differences in international engagement based on the location of cities due to the smaller number of responses in some geographic regions.

We also compare some responses between the 2018, 2020 and 2022 surveys. All three iterations surveyed a diverse and broadly comparable sample of cities with representation from each geographic region. Despite this, it is important to acknowledge that in all iterations cities of the global North and larger cities which are actively engaged in international affairs represented a majority of the sample. For this reason, the results should not be taken as indicative of cities generally on a global scale. We have highlighted findings that may show trends but are cautious in drawing substantive conclusions regarding the variations over time due to the differing samples across the surveys.

¹ For simplicity, the surveys in this report are referred to by the publication year rather than the date of data collection.

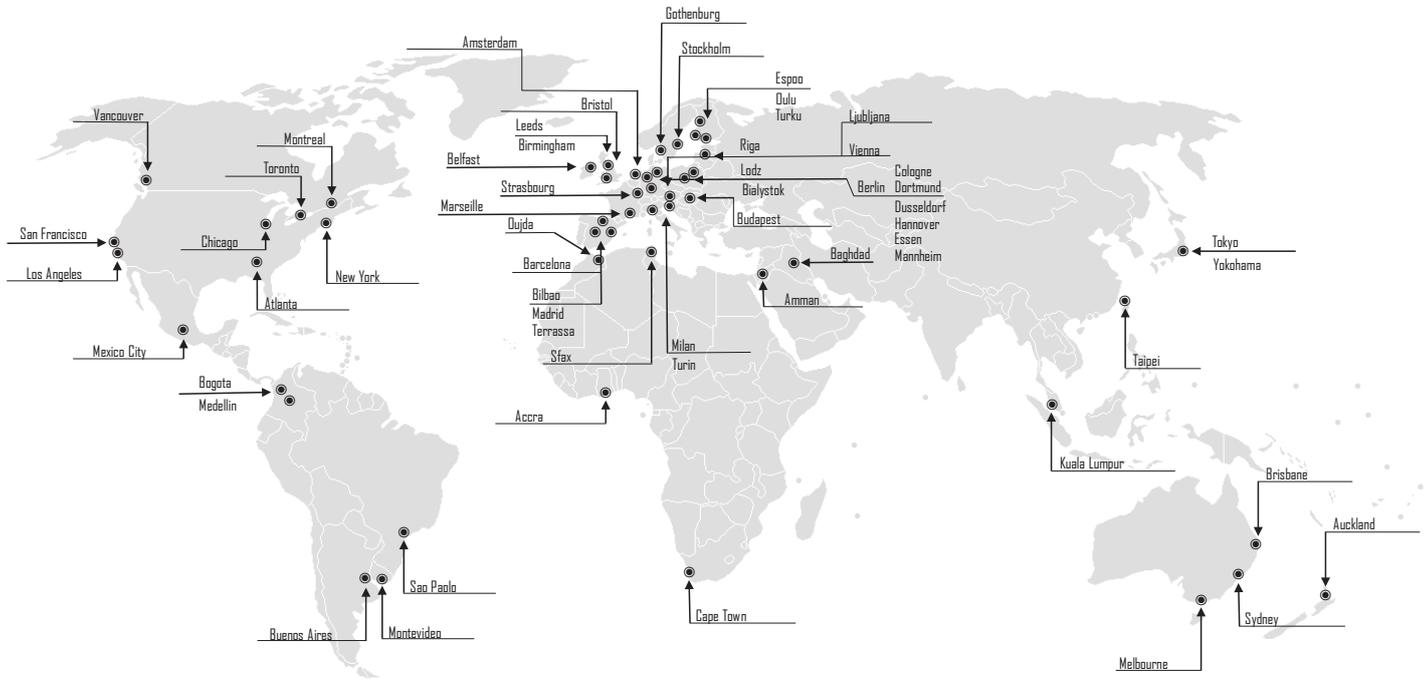


Figure 1

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Accra | Dortmund | New York City ^a ^b |
| Amman ^β | Dusseldorf | Oujda |
| Amsterdam ^a ^b | Espoo | Oulu |
| Atlanta ^a ^b | Essen | Riga |
| Auckland ^a | Gothenburg ^a | San Francisco |
| Baghdad ^β | Hannover | Sao Paulo ^β |
| Barcelona ^β | Kuala Lumpur ^β | Sfax |
| Belfast | Leeds | Stockholm ^a ^b |
| Berlin | Ljubljana ^β | Strasbourg |
| Bialystok | Lodz | Sydney |
| Bilbao ^a | Los Angeles ^a | Taipei ^β |
| Birmingham | Madrid ^a ^b | Terrassa |
| Bogota | Mannheim ^β | Tokyo ^a ^b |
| Brisbane | Marseille | Toronto |
| Bristol ^β | Medellin ^β | Turin |
| Budapest | Melbourne ^a ^b | Turku |
| Buenos Aires ^β | Mexico City ^a ^b | Vancouver ^a ^b |
| Cape Town ^β | Milan ^a ^b | Vienna ^a ^b |
| Chicago ^a ^b | Montevideo ^β | Yokohama |
| Cologne | Montreal | |

^a Participated in 2018

^β Participated in 2020

3. KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

INTERNATIONAL OFFICES AND FUNDING

In total, 93% of cities reported having an official international office, a slight rise from the 88% in 2020. Nine in ten also had a senior manager responsible for international engagement. This was similar to the 93% in 2020, but an increase from the 81% reported in 2018. Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 70% of cities had allocated funding for international travel in the previous year, an increase of 75% from the 2020 survey, whose data were collected prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Over two-thirds of cities funded delegations and almost three-quarters funded international conferences and events (figure 2). By comparison, only 38% of cities said they allocated funding for international conferences and events in 2020. More European cities reported funding all of these activities compared to non-European cities. These differences were most notable in international delegations, which 77% of European cities funded compared to 54% non-European cities, and conferences (84% compared to 54%). Despite these allocations, international budgets remain limited, with 80% of cities stating that they would increase their international engagement if they had more dedicated funds. Cities reported seeking external funding to support their international activities due to limited budgetary allocations. What remains unclear is the extent to which these limited budgets affected cities' international engagement activities, especially in the context of the increasing virtual events occurring during the pandemic.

International activities funded by cities in the previous year



Figure 2

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Respondents were asked to report their level of engagement with a range of international partners. City networks were the entities with which the highest number of respondents reported having a 'close partnership' at 81%, with an additional 15% stating they have some engagement with such networks (figure 3). UN agencies were another common international partner with over three-quarters of cities having 'some engagement' with these organisations and 36% believing these to be close partnerships.

Despite the move to more networked forms of city-to-city collaboration, twinning remains a frequent method of international city engagement, with 64% of cities stating they contact a twin or sister city at least once a month and some stating this engagement was much more frequent. Close to all (93%) cities had conducted an economic or cultural mission to another city in the previous three years.

In terms of attracting international funding, over 30% of cities reported either a close partnership or some engagement with multilateral lending agencies, such as the World Bank or Inter-American Development Bank, and almost 60% said they engaged with philanthropies. Only 11% of cities reported a close partnership with multinational companies, while a quarter had some engagement with these actors. There are significant opportunities for cities to increase their international engagement with the private sector, and we have observed some recent notable examples of these partnerships including major business support for transnational city climate initiatives.⁶

IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT

Respondents were asked which types of international engagement have had the greatest impact on their city's policymaking. City networking was overwhelmingly the most common response, selected by 81% of cities. Twinning/sister city programs were second (41%), followed by the localisation of global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (36%), international conferences and one-on-one diplomatic visits (both 25%). Multilateral forums were impactful for 17% and 14% saw impact from participation in national government-led initiatives (e.g. visits and exchanges). City networking and twinning were also the two most highly ranked responses in 2020.

In terms of the greatest benefits of international city engagement, respondents most commonly identified adapting

Level of engagement with international partners

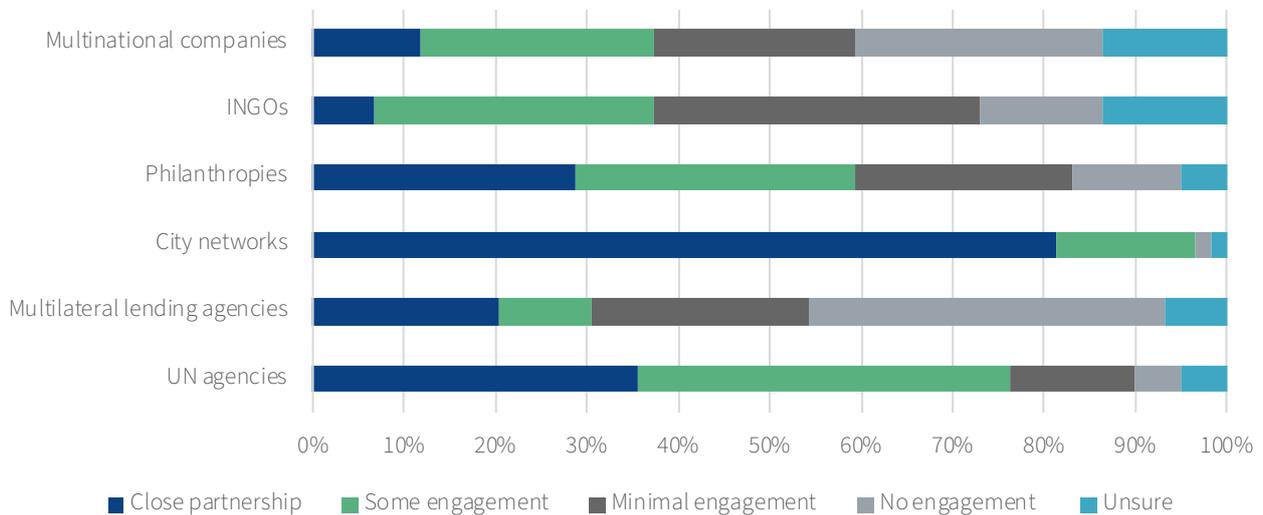


Figure 3

policies from other cities (71%), benchmarking performance against other cities (61%), collective advocacy (49%) and accessing financial support (46%) as having the greatest impacts. Fewer cities saw the greatest impacts from accessing data (25%) and accessing materials/supplies (15%). European cities in particular valued the benefits of learning from other city experiences with 84% selecting policy adaptation and 68% selecting benchmarking as having the greatest impacts.

Networking activities were generally viewed as positive and effective forms of engagement across the survey. However, 61% of cities believed that there were currently too many city networks to engage in all that were relevant. This is perhaps unsurprising given the extensive proliferation of this mode of formal transnational collaboration.⁷

Even back in 2018, respondents reported city leaders' limited time as the key barrier to greater network participation. In 2022, 90% of respondents believed large cities should be a part of international city networks and 80% said the same regarding medium- and smaller-sized cities.

TOP ISSUES

Respondents were asked to identify the top three issues where their cities engage internationally. Climate change was by far the most frequently selected issue, with 73% of respondents choosing it in their top three. It was also the most frequently ranked top issue in 2020, followed by resilience and development. The next most important issues in 2022 were economic development (48%), resilience (31%), regional cooperation (29%) and COVID-19 (27%).

There were significant differences between the top issues for European and non-European cities. Only European cities selected regional cooperation as a top international issue, reflecting the strong focus on this agenda from the European Union and many European city networks. Almost a quarter of European cities selected urban inequality, compared to only one city outside of Europe. Conversely, only one European city said waste was one of their top issues for international engagement, compared to 29% of non-European cities. Across both groups climate was clearly the top priority area.

At the time of the survey, with the final responses received in February 2022, no city had identified international conflict as one of their top issues. In this context, the recent proliferation of city-led initiatives supporting Ukraine in the current conflict with Russia is notable, especially with increasing effects of migration in cities across Europe.⁸ As with COVID-19 in 2020, this could be an influential future trend.



COVID-19 RESPONSE

The onset and continued management of the COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly the major global contextual difference between the 2020 and 2022 surveys. The 2022 iteration asked a series of questions regarding the value of international engagement to inform COVID-19 response in cities.

Almost three-quarters of respondents stated that they engaged internationally from the onset of the pandemic, while another 19% said they did so 'sometime into the crisis'. Some major city networks, such as C40 Cities, pivoted quickly to provide a forum for transnational engagement and support during the early stages of the crisis while others have altered their regular operations to focus on pandemic response and urban health.⁹

Almost three-quarters of respondents stated that they engaged internationally from the onset of the pandemic, while another 19% said they did so 'sometime into the crisis'.

Cities were asked how influential different types of international partners had been in shaping their response to COVID-19. Almost two-thirds of cities who responded to this question believed city networks were in some way influential to their pandemic response. Twin or sister city relationships were also seen as very or somewhat influential for half of respondents.

A small number (12%) reported that UN agencies were very influential and 34% somewhat influential. Less commonly, cities credited at least some influence to philanthropies (27%), international nongovernment organisations (17%) and multinational companies (9%), indicating outreach to a wide variety of international partners informed pandemic response. There were two notable differences between European and non-European cities, with 40% of European cities finding UN agencies very or somewhat influential to their COVID-19 response, compared to 61% of non-European cities. Only 8% of European cities said that multinational corporations were very influential, compared to 43% of cities outside Europe.

This influence in shaping pandemic response came through various forms of engagement. Adaptation or comparison were common advantages reported from international engagement (figure 4). Almost two-thirds of respondents said they adapted policies from other cities, 59% used external engagement to access data and 41% benchmarked their performance against other cities.

Cities also looked abroad for material and financial support – more than half reported they engaged internationally to access materials or supplies and 24% for financial support. In a similar manner to other issues, many cities said they worked with international partners to collectively advocate to improve urban pandemic response (37%).

Which international activities influenced cities' COVID-19 response

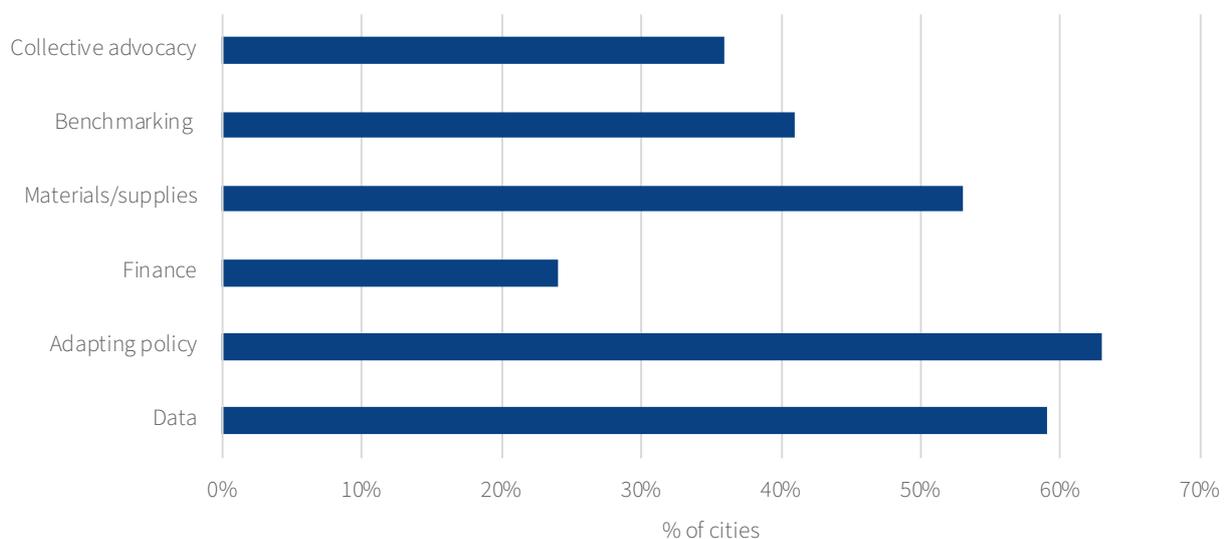


Figure 4 (cities could select as many responses as applied)

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Increasingly we see local authorities hiring diplomats with national foreign policy experience or appointing key advisors from these fields. Despite this, only half of cities said that staff who conduct international activities had received relevant training for their role. This was a small increase on the 43% reported in 2020 (which was itself a large increase from the 19% in 2018), but still suggests limited dedicated training offerings for international city officers (figure 5). Where staff had received training, it was most commonly conducted through networking/training workshops, conferences, informal training from peers or self-guided learning. These were also the four most common modes identified in 2020, stressing a continuing lack of formal capacity building in city diplomacy.

Almost two-thirds of cities agreed that they would engage more in city diplomacy if they had access to better training and capacity building on international issues.

When asked to identify which types of training would be most valuable for international officers working in their city, these four modes were also among the most commonly selected, but 30% saw value in strategic planning training, 20% in public relations and 22% in a formal certificate related to international affairs or policy. In only 10% of cases where international officers had received training was this a formal certificate, and only 14% had specific training in strategic planning or public relations. Almost two-thirds of cities agreed that they would engage more in city diplomacy if they had access to better training and capacity building on international issues.



Do city diplomats receive relevant training?

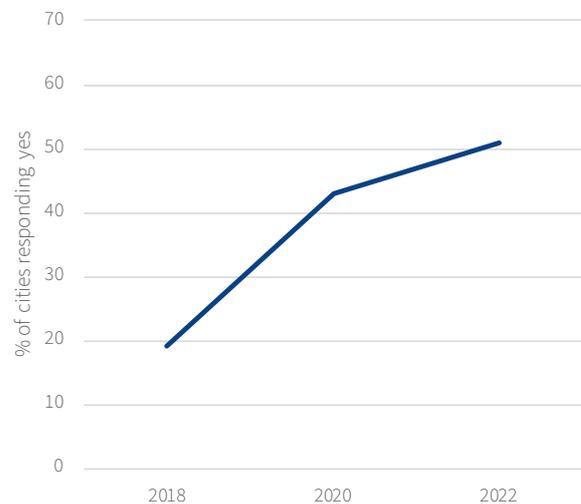


Figure 5

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CITY DIPLOMACY

Cities often report challenges in communicating the value of international engagements to their citizens and other stakeholders.¹⁰ Over two-thirds of respondents, however, believed that their citizens understood the importance of international engagement for city governments. When asked to identify the international activities that citizens most value there was a wide variety of responses. All 59 cities believed their citizens valued engagement with climate summits, while a majority believed citizens valued engagement in city networks and twinning. Many cities provided bespoke responses to this question reflecting local realities such as major international sporting events, engagement in peace processes, and local festivals and events with international partners.

Over two-thirds of respondents believed that their citizens understood the importance of international engagement for city governments.

THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL CITY LEADERS

Individual leadership was viewed as an important factor in international city engagement, with 85% of respondents believing that the personal networks of leaders help cities achieve their international objectives. This was similar to the 80% in 2020. More than half (58%) reported that their city's international agenda changed significantly when the leadership changed, with the remainder experiencing more continuity in their diplomatic activities.

ENGAGEMENT BACK HOME: NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL CITY NETWORKS

Recent policy and academic interest has emerged on how national–local relations impact the diplomacy of cities. This conversation has been fueled in part by tangible or proposed changes to legislation: for example, Australia’s Foreign Relations Act of 2020 which grants the Australian government the power to review and potentially veto city-level international engagements, or the advocacy in the US for the establishment of an Office for Subnational Diplomacy in the State Department.¹¹

In general, most cities reported some form of engagement with their national government regarding their international activities. Over a third (39%) said they contact a national government representative at least once a month and 27% at least once every three months. No city replied that they never contact their national counterparts regarding their international engagement (three were unsure). On the reverse side, almost 60% said their national government contacted the city regarding international engagement at least once every three months (27% said at least once a month) and only one respondent said their national government never contacts their city regarding international affairs. In 2020, 61% of respondents who answered the question indicated that they coordinate with their national government on international engagement.

In 2022, the clear majority of this national–local engagement was ad hoc (73%), with only 19% of cities having regularly scheduled meetings with national counterparts (figure 6). This was similar to 2020, in which two-thirds of these engagements were reported as ad hoc and only 14% regular.

How cities engage with national government on foreign policy

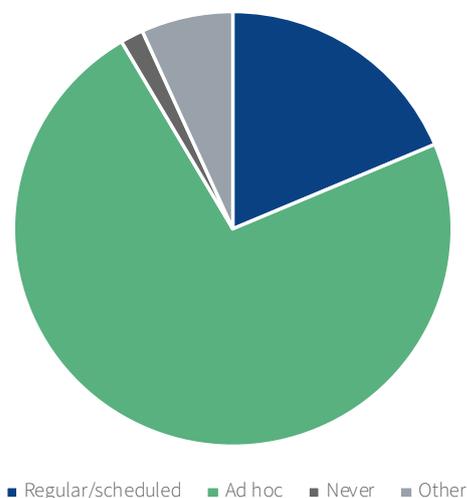


Figure 6

Climate change (68%), economic development (64%) and COVID-19 (63%) were the global issues that cities most commonly reported as areas of national–local coordination, but there was also significant engagement on migration (44%) and trade (39%). Fewer cities reported this type of engagement on security issues such as cyber security (12%) and international conflict (10%).

The survey included a number of attitudinal questions related to national–local relations and city diplomacy. In general, cities prefer autonomy over their international engagements with only 20% believing national governments should have a say in how cities conduct these affairs. This was the same percentage as in 2020. Despite the desire for autonomy, 70% of respondents believed cities would benefit from more direct engagement with foreign affairs offices in their countries. Three-quarters also believed that national governments should provide funding to cities to conduct international activities.

There was also strong support for the benefits of national diplomats working with city international offices (90% agreeing with this proposition). Indeed, some programs have embedded national diplomats within subnational offices, for example the Pearson Fellowships in the US.¹²

Cities prefer autonomy over their international engagements with only 20% believing national governments should have a say in how cities conduct these affairs.

One of the key findings from the 2020 report was the confidence that cities expressed in their capacity to deal with global challenges. In 2020, 69% believed they had a greater capacity to enact change in areas such as climate change than their national governments. This confidence was further increased in the 2022 sample with 73% agreeing with this proposition. Almost two-thirds of cities said they would engage more in international affairs if they have more explicit authority on international issues.

A minority of cities saw risks resulting from their international engagements. Around one in five believed that city diplomacy could create national security risks while 27% saw the potential for it to create conflict between city and national governments.

National city networking was another popular mode of exchange within countries with almost two-thirds of cities engaging with a national city network at least once a month. In 2018, a similar 69% reported engaging with national city networks. In 2022, when compared with transnational city networking, respondents saw more benefits from accessing data through national city networks (49%), most likely due to shared contexts. The most commonly identified benefit was collectively lobbying their national government (70%).

ADOPTION AND LOCALISATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

An increasing form of international engagement for cities is the adoption and alignment of their strategies with multilateral processes and agreements. Cities are also becoming more involved in the development of these agendas and are more commonly identified as relevant actors in achieving global goals.¹³

Four-fifths of cities surveyed formally subscribe to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 73% report on or use the SDGs in their city planning. This was an increase on the 55% who said they track their performance against the SDGs in 2020. More cities outside of Europe said they used the SDGs in their reporting (80%), compared to European cities (65%). Almost half of non-European cities selected ‘localising global agendas’ as one of the three international engagement activities with the greatest impact, compared to only 26% of European cities. Many cities globally have taken the commitment to the SDGs further and developed a Voluntary Local Review (VLR), a localised form of the Voluntary National Review where states report on their progress toward meeting the SDGs. Sixteen of the 59 cities in the survey had previously completed a VLR and an additional 12 were planning on or currently developing a VLR.

Other common international processes or agreements that cities subscribed to were the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (70%), the New Urban Agenda (46%), the Global Compact on Migration (29%) and the Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (Hyogo, Sendai Frameworks) (24%).

Sixteen of the 59 cities in the survey had previously completed a VLR and an additional 12 were planning on or currently developing a VLR.

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES

Three-quarters of respondents said their city has an international strategy (figure 7). This was a similar result to 2020 and a slight rise compared to 2018. More European cities reported having an international strategy (84%) compared to non-European cities (64%). Globally, about the same number of cities which had an international strategy said it was nested within a broader strategy (44%) versus a stand-alone document (40%). The remaining 16% selected ‘Other’ or ‘Unsure’. Almost 70% of these strategies were publicly available.

In 2018, 50% of respondents with an international strategy reported that it was a part of a broader city plan and 39% reported that it was publicly available. In 2020, a significantly higher 70% of cities which had an international strategy said it was stand-alone and 73% stated that it was publicly available.

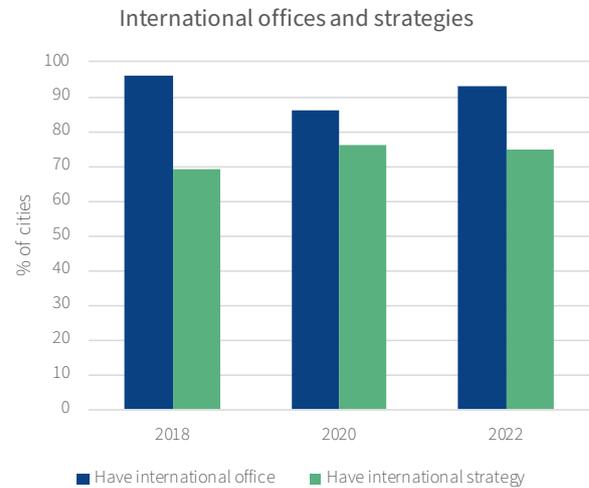
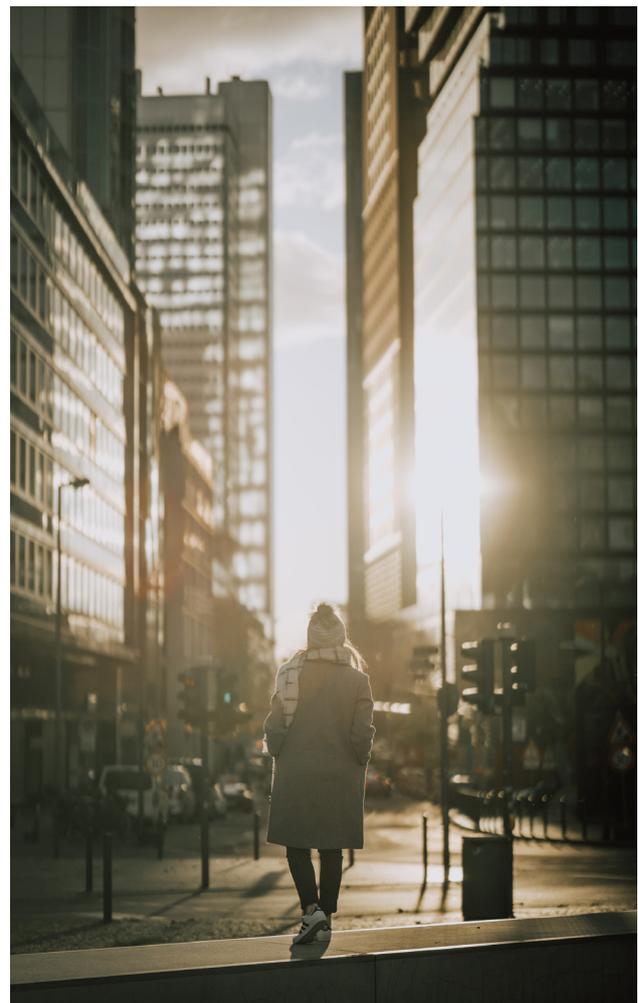


Figure 7



4. CONCLUSION

Globalisation, in particular the free movement of people and capital, has been essential in elevating the importance of cities within the world economy and the global order. It is this elevation which paved the way for cities to become not only sites where global exchanges occur, but purposeful international actors with influence in the development of global policy agendas beyond mere implementation.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic with the institution of border closures and a dramatic downturn in international travel and exchange could have led to a return to domestic priorities and a pause in city diplomatic practice. Instead, the evidence in this survey suggests not only a continuation but in some areas an increase in the international engagement of city governments. Of note is the rapidity through which cities engaged internationally to inform their COVID-19 responses and their repurposing of the existing ecosystem of transnational city networks to fill this role. This was coupled with a wide array of international partners that cities reported collaborating with to address the challenge.

Despite the ongoing confidence that respondents expressed in their ability to meet global challenges, there remain significant opportunities to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of city diplomacy. Training and capacity building appears to be a key factor with still only half of cities reporting their international staff received relevant training for their activities. While most cities which responded had a dedicated international office, these are mostly small teams with limited budgets and respondents expressed a desire to access more funding for their international engagement. An underutilised avenue for this support is direct engagement with national governments. However, cities have expressed a strong desire to retain independence over their international activities.

In the future, we are likely to see an exacerbation of many of the global challenges cities currently face such as climate change, migration and inequality that are more immediately experienced in urban contexts. But coupled with this will be greater opportunity to influence the global responses to these challenges through leveraging partnerships that cities have built with many international actors.

5. METHODS

Data collection for this study involved the delivery of a Qualtrics questionnaire in English. The survey was delivered to approximately 100 local governments and disseminated to the member networks of the German Marshall Fund City Directors of International Affairs and Eurocities. Surveys were disseminated in November 2021 and responses received between November 2021 and February 2022. Invitations were mostly directed to the manager of the international affairs team or a person with equivalent responsibilities in the local authority. In cities without this position, the invitation was directed to an officer who routinely conducts international work. All cities who completed the 2020 survey were invited to participate again, and additional contacts were identified through professional networks of the Melbourne Centre for Cities and desktop research.

The questionnaire involved 34 questions and built on previous iterations, including several of the same questions to allow for comparison between the survey iterations. Several new questions were added to reflect changing realities (e.g. the pandemic and central–local relations) and questions from the 2020 survey were amended based on participant feedback. The overall survey was of equivalent length to the 2020 iteration. Section 1 of the survey focused on the international office, staffing, training and strategies. Section 2 focused on international engagement activities, and engagement with international agreements and organisations. Section 3 focused on the impact of international engagement on policymaking and citizen engagement. Section 4 focused on coordination with the national government on foreign policy and domestic networking. Section 5 focused on the role of international engagement in shaping COVID-19 response strategies. Finally, Section 6 focused on the attitudes of respondents to a series of propositions related to city diplomacy.

In total, 59 local governments fully responded to the survey. Partial responses were discarded. Responses were geographically diverse with cities from all continents included. Due to the strong response from European cities, there was however a skew in the data toward this continent, which has been acknowledged in the report. Analysis of European and non-European city responses was conducted and major differences presented in the findings. Given the skew in the data toward cities in the global North it is important to consider for future iterations ways to amend the questionnaire to make it suitable for a broader range of cities across the global South to complete. A strength of the current survey is its comprehensiveness,

which was commended by several respondents, but this does create challenges for cities that do not have a centralised team responsible for international engagement or who only engage internationally in certain policy areas. A key limitation for broader geographic engagement was also the unilingual nature of the questionnaire. While it was not feasible to translate the survey in this iteration, this could be an important avenue for increasing geographic representativeness in future versions.

Survey data was analysed using SPSS and compared with the data from the 2020 and 2018 surveys in relevant sections. While 26 of the cities which participated in 2020 also completed the 2022 survey the analysis was not directly longitudinal in nature and compared the global results across the three iterations. Given the sample sizes some inferences are made on changing trends between the studies, however these should be considered in the context of the varied sample sizes and proportionally higher European city responses in the 2022 survey.

6. NOTES

- 1 Acuto, M., Decramer, H., Kerr, J., Klaus, I., Tabor, S., & Toly, N. J. (2018). *Toward city diplomacy: Assessing capacity in select global cities*. Chicago Council on Global Affairs; City Leadership Lab, University College London; Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne.
- 2 Kosovac, A., Hartley, K., Gunning, D., & Acuto, M. (2020). *Conducting city diplomacy: A survey of international engagement in 47 cities*. Chicago Council on Global Affairs; Connected Cities Lab, University of Melbourne. <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/report/conducting-city-diplomacy-survey-international-engagement-47-cities>.
- 3 Acuto, M., Kosovac, A., Pejic, D., & Jones, T. L. (2021). The city as actor in UN frameworks: Formalizing 'urban agency' in the international system? *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2020.1860810>.
- 4 Galceran-Vercher, M. (2021). The role of cities in a reformed UN: Towards the institutionalization of the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments. In A. Fernández de Losada & M. Galceran (Eds.), *Cities in Global Governance: From Multilateralism to Multistakeholderism?* CIDOB.
- 5 Post-pandemic COVID-19 World Order: Decline of Neoliberalism and Strike Back of the State? A Reading from Gramsci. (2021). In C. M. Sánchez Ramírez, *Knowledge Capitalism and State Theory* (pp. 137–155). Springer International Publishing.
- 6 Kosovac, A., & Pejic, D. (2021). What's next? New forms of city diplomacy and emerging global urban governance. In A. Fernández de Losada & M. Galceran (Eds.), *Cities in Global Governance: From Multilateralism to Multistakeholderism?* CIDOB.
- 7 Acuto, M., & Leffel, B. (2021). Understanding the global ecosystem of city networks. *Urban Studies*, 58(9). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098020929261>.
- 8 Eurocities. (2022, March 14). More than 150 cities stand with Ukraine. <https://eurocities.eu/latest/more-than-150-cities-stand-with-ukraine/>.
- 9 Pipa, A. F., & Bouchet, M. (2020, August 6). How to make the most of city diplomacy in the COVID-19 era. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/08/06/how-to-make-the-most-of-city-diplomacy-in-the-covid-19-era/>.
- 10 Galceran-Vercher, M., Fernández de Losada, A., & de la Varga, O. (2021). Understanding the value proposition of city networks: Towards a framework for measuring impact (No. 35; CIDOB Briefings). Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB). https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/cidob_policy_brief/understanding_the_value_proposition_of_city_networks_towards_a_framework_for_measuring_impact.
- 11 Pejic, D., & Acuto, M. (2022). City diplomacy back home: Central–local tensions in a time of global urban governance. *Journal of International Affairs*, 74(1).
- 12 Pipa, A. F., & Bouchet, M. (2021, February 17). Partnership among cities, states, and the federal government: Creating an office of subnational diplomacy at the US Department of State. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/partnership-among-cities-states-and-the-federal-government-creating-an-office-of-subnational-diplomacy-at-the-us-department-of-state/>.
- 13 Kosovac, A., Acuto, M., & Jones, T. L. (2020). Acknowledging Urbanization: A Survey of the Role of Cities in UN Frameworks. *Global Policy*, 11(3), 293–304.
- 14 Curtis, S. (2016). *Global cities and global order*. Oxford University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Daniel Pejic is a Research Fellow in the Melbourne Centre for Cities at the University of Melbourne. His research explores city diplomacy and the role of cities in global governance and sits at the intersection of international relations and urban politics. He has also held a number of professional research roles and leadership positions, working to communicate and translate evidence into policy for international organisations, and federal, state and local governments in Australia.

Michele Acuto is director of the Melbourne Centre for Cities, Professor in Urban Politics and Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning. He is an expert in urban governance and international affairs. Michele is also a non-resident Senior Fellow of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and serves on a number of committees for the City of Melbourne. He has previously taught at the University of Oxford, Australian National University and University College London, and worked for the World Bank Group, European Commission and as an advisor on city diplomacy for the World Health Organization. He has published widely on this topic, including *The Urban Link* (Routledge, 2013) and *How to Build a Global City* (Cornell, 2022).

Anna Kosovac is a Lecturer and Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne and a Visiting Fellow at the Melbourne Centre for Cities. Her research spans areas of city diplomacy, urban governance and water management. Anna has over a decade of experience working in government departments on issues of sustainability and water.







For more information visit
research.unimelb.edu.au/cities

—
Melbourne Centre
for Cities