

CITY REPORT

Cádiz

Welcoming migrants despite economic difficulties.

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1. Abstract & Key-Takeaway

Key Takeaway:



Cádiz shows that despite socio-economic problems, a unified political leadership can deliver powerful messages to local residents, other cities, national governments, and the EU—about how cities can defend a rights-centred approach to protect refugees and vulnerable migrants.

What is unique about the city?

Challenging the government: The southern city of Cádiz in Spain has experienced persistently high unemployment rates and a shrinking population in the last decades. Despite these issues, in 2015, Cádiz local government became one of the most outspoken critics of both the Spanish government and the EU in the response to the arrival of people seeking international protection.

What is the focus of local migration policies?

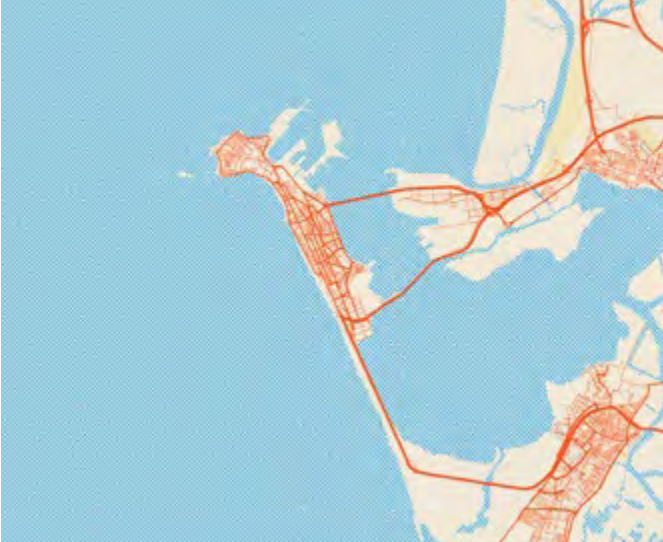
Creating a pro-migrant discourse: The city mayor Mr. José María ‘Kichi’ González has become a familiar face in Spanish media, through his fervent defense of the role of cities in receiving refugees and vulnerable migrants. His government has built a discourse of welcome and defence of human rights. Such discourse has become a distinctive mark for its residents, in national circles and in trans-municipal networks. After years of conservative governments, his premiership has seen an increasing emphasis on refugee and migrant-related issues locally.

What are the most outstanding results so far?

Increased awareness on social inclusion: The new administration’s activity has mainly involved supporting awareness-raising and social inclusion initiatives, as the city is a relevant transit point for migrants arriving into Europe from Northern Africa. Throughout the last years, despite economic difficulties, the mayor in particular has been successful in establishing the city’s pro-migrant stance.

Political activities and advocacy beyond the city level?

Since the beginning of the European Refugee Crisis, Cádiz has publicly criticised the Spanish government and the EU for not enforcing compromises on human rights. The local government has taken several steps to put forward their position on this topic. The city's presence in national debates on these issues has been fairly visible, as a founding member of the Spanish network Cities of Refuge. In June 2017, the city was officially declared a City of Refuge.



Population
115,439

Location/ region
Autonomous Community of Andalusia
(Southern Spain)

Mayor (party)
José María González (Adelante Cádiz)

2. Local background and context

Since a new progressive government took power in 2015, Cádiz has shown a visible and stronger commitment in promoting a culture of welcome towards vulnerable migrants. Migration governance has been characterised by cooperation among relevant civil society actors, mainly affiliated to the Catholic Church, and the new administration. Relevant actions in refugee reception and immigration have been related to advocacy and awareness raising campaigns, and participating in forums beyond city boundaries.

The city of Cádiz is located in the southernmost Spanish province of the same name. It has gained notoriety over the last three decades as the main transit point for migrants crossing the Strait of Gibraltar from Morocco. The presence of migrants in an irregular administrative situation, including unaccompanied migrant children in the last years, has put the city in the spotlight (ADPHA, 2015). In 2015, Cádiz had a major political shift as a new progressive government was elected to lead the city. Those elections broke 20 years of conservative governments which had not truly politicised issues related to immigration or international protection. In fact, the low numbers of foreign-born residents living in the city (less than 2%) had not created enough traction to place an explicit approach towards immigration on the agenda. Moreover, its condition

as a transit city, coupled with the centralized nature of border control in Spain, did not encourage the city administration to take a more active role. The progressive government elected in 2015 has since changed this position.

A new progressive coalition

In its first term (2015-2019), the local government was formed through a coalition between Cádiz Moves (CM) (In Spanish: Adelante Cádiz) and the centre-left Socialist Party (PSOE), a mainstream political party in Spanish politics. CM's election marked the entrance of a political force formed by a multiplicity of anti-capitalist, feminist, and radical left grass-root movements. This proactive approach towards migrants and refugees was reinforced by the absolute majority CM won in the 2019 municipal elections.

The Catholic Church as civil society coordinator

Migration governance in the city has centred on intercultural inclusion, especially through promoting a culture of welcome, as well as migration-friendly city branding. On a lesser scale, the city has also re-organized the existing resources along with central local organizations working on the reception of migrants and refugees. From the local administration, the Delegation of Social Services is responsible for promoting such a culture of welcome. A symbol of such a commitment includes the placement of a dinghy next to the Castle of Santa Catalina in the old town, as a testimony of the difficult conditions of vulnerable migrants. As for civil society actors, they are mainly grouped under the Diocesan Secretariat of the Pastoral of Migrations. The Catholic Church, through this Secretariat, has a quite central role as it coordinates their advocacy and social works through organizations like Land for All Centre (Centro Tierra de Todos) and Cardijn. Another central organization is the Andalusian Association for Human Rights (Asociación Pro-Derechos Humanos de Andalucía - ADPHA). Cádiz's tradition of progressive grass-root Catholic forces working on social justice energised the existence of such organisations (Alcalde and Portos, 2018).¹ Other relevant civil society actors include the Spanish Red Cross and the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado - CEAR). Traditionally, these organizations have strongly advocated for a rights-centred approach to the arrival of migrants.

¹ Although in Cádiz the archbishop is known for his conservative positions, the existing traction from these organizations nurtures such welcoming approaches. There is also the work of priests and nuns that believe in solidarity actions and support such organizations. Also Cádiz is known for a strong Catholic tradition, Holy Week in the city is quite central so this tradition combined with a working-class profile of the city makes it a fertile soil for the existence of such movements.

One of the defining features of the new administration has been to reinforce cooperative relationships with civil society organizations. Up to 2015, civil society actors seemed to work in parallel with local administration on topics related to migrants. However, since that year a more fluid relationship has been established. This is especially evident in collaboration to promote a culture of welcome through relevant artistic exhibitions, participating in demonstrations supporting refugees, as well as co-organizing talks on related topics. In this context, cooperation has benefited from the offer of public funding for organisations focused on human rights, including those with activities on reception.

The limits of change on a local level

Although the city of Cádiz has been quite vocal in defending refugees and vulnerable migrants, local authorities have claimed it is impossible to act due to the current Spanish framework of competencies and the lack of resources. It says the national level decides the terms of international protection, as well as the ways migrants can regularize their situation. Their position contrasts with criticism from local activists, who claim the city government had a well-intended discourse that did not translate into concrete actions. Informants for this report claimed the local government needed to put more resources in place to fulfil the expectations created around its discourse. In fact, it was not possible to find strategic plans establishing city actions in refugee and immigrant reception for this report.

3. Selected local approaches

The local government decided to take a proactive approach to the reception of refugees and migrants. In fact, the city's declaration as a place of refuge meant a qualitative leap in prioritising related issues. The city's position is exemplary as it decided to include the defence of migrants and refugees as an aspect strongly grounded in debates about global justice, the defence of human rights and a broad and inclusive definition of citizenship. It is in this context where local approaches have been strongly focused on three areas: building a narrative of welcome, intercultural inclusion, and social rights. Although the city of Cádiz has not displayed particularly important resources related to welcome as Spanish cities like Valencia or Barcelona, its visible shift towards refugee and immigrant inclusion is noteworthy considering its politically conservative background and its socio-economic problems.

3.1 Discursive actions around refugees, migrants and human rights

One of the most visible practices in the city of Cádiz involves advancing the role of cities in welcoming refugees and vulnerable migrants. In this regard, Cádiz's mayor has repeatedly used a discourse defending these groups from the treatment they receive in Spain and Europe. This is based on the idea that cities need to show solidarity towards those in need. Moreover, such move is framed under advocacy for global justice and the role that cities have in achieving such a goal. The city of Cádiz has thus built alliances to reinforce their solidarity with other cities. Mayor José 'Kichi' González Santos is known for his easygoing and direct style, which proves popular among working class residents. His popularity in the city helps legitimise the local government's direction in this area. This approach shows how popular political leaders can help in promoting positive discourses among local residents and beyond the city boundaries.

Advocating for a welcoming narrative

Mayor José María 'Kichi' González was one of the first Spanish mayors to join Barcelona's call for a common front before the Spanish government and the EU in the 2015 request to receive Syrian refugees. Since then, local officials have displayed a discourse that seeks to promote a welcoming narrative in the city. For instance, on 10 November, 2020, the city joined the mayors of Barcelona, Valencia, Lleida, and seven other cities in a letter asking the Spanish government to reinstate the Reception and Integration Fund. The city has been present in meetings organized by the Spanish City of Refuge network as they bring their concerns with refugees and vulnerable migrants to the table. Countering nativist and anti-immigrant discourses is explicitly mentioned. For instance, mayor and other top-ranking officials filled headlines across the country by offering Cádiz as a safe harbour for sea rescue NGOs working in the Gibraltar Strait in August 2019. This point has been especially controversial in Europe, as certain EU governments have tried to criminalise sea operations rescuing stranded migrants in boats. The mayor declared:

“...accusing those who fight for a better world of not facing import decisions (...) is to stand next to the Salvini, Le Pens and Abascales and the voices that want to fill our borders with lack of solidarity and wires that wound the skin to shreds.”

City of Cádiz, 13 August, 2019

The local government, along with civil society and local activists, has participated and organised different demonstrations to support refugees and migrants in need. The presence of the mayor and members of his cabinet has become the norm during these demonstrations. For instance, the mayor promoted a demonstration on 16 March, 2016 to support refugees and reject the EU-Turkey deal to return potential asylum seekers to Turkey. In an interview related to the demonstration, the mayor stated that: “...it is shameful to see the selfish and mercantilistic position of the EU, whose main objective should be the defense of human rights.” In June 2017, the local government joined and promoted Refugees Day.

The mayor's persona has been instrumental in advancing such a positive stance. For his supporters, his direct style has helped in advancing his message across the city. For his opponents, he is a populist that is focusing on issues that are not, according to them, as relevant as others, such as high unemployment.

3.2 Refugees, migrants, and constructing intercultural inclusion

The city of Cádiz has strongly worked at creating a culture of welcome by focusing on awareness-raising actions targeting the local population. These actions can be framed under the label of intercultural inclusion,

as they seek to educate the public about the human rights that refugees and vulnerable migrants have. In this regard, local organizations have put forward a series of measures sponsored by the municipal government. This approach is exemplary as it seeks to educate the public about the reality lived by refugees and migrants in a transit city such as Cádiz. It is particularly relevant in a city that for over 20 years was governed by consecutive conservative governments that did not prioritize immigrant-related issues.

Campaign against misinformation

The Andalusian Association for Human Rights (Asociación Pro-Derechos Humanos de Andalucía - ADPHA) in Cádiz launched the #DoNotBeConfused campaign ([#QueNoTeConfundan](#)) in 2019. This campaign fights hate speech in the city and addresses the misinformation residents may receive from relatives, work colleagues, and on their cellphones. Creators were motivated to start such a campaign after the far-right political party Vox entered the Andalusian regional parliament. The campaign is intended to address the most common rumours against these groups, while contrasting them with accurate information. The first tool was to develop a webpage and a leaflet with these rumours alongside the information tackling them. Campaigners also placed exhibition panels with this information in schools, associations, and selected public spaces with high visibility. This campaign comes with talks, videos, and interactive panels. In local schools, members of the campaign also offer awareness workshops where they speak with high school students. Anyone interested in the workshops can write to the campaign asking for a visit.

Reusing a boat as a memorial

Another example relates to efforts to use culture as a vehicle exposing local residents to the drama suffered by vulnerable migrants that come to Spain through the Gibraltar Strait, or by refugees fleeing conflict zones. As part of the celebration of Human Rights Day on 10 December, 2017, the municipal government, along with ADPHA, permanently placed a dinghy next to the Castle of Santa Catalina in the old town—as a testimony of the difficult conditions of vulnerable migrants arriving in Spain. Smugglers left the dinghy on the Victoria city beach on 4 November, 2017. According to promoters, the boat should serve as a symbol of solidarity and as a reminder of the drama of immigration. The opening ceremony had more than 10 non-state social actors representing their support for the city's position on this issue.

The Encyclopedia of Migrants

Finally, it is worth mentioning the artistic activities developed with municipal government support. The first is [The Encyclopaedia of Migrants](#). This is a transnational project coordinated by the Rennes association for artistic experimentation 'Age de la Tortue.' 400 hand-written testimonies from migrants living in eight European cities were collected, with Cádiz as one of the participating cities. The municipal government

exhibited three volumes in the Contemporary Creation Space (ECCO) and deposited them in the Celestino Mutis library. It also supported the Interrapción Refugees Welcome Music Festival ([INT17](#)). Such an international festival focuses on issues related to global justice and solidarity. In the 2017 edition, festival organizers held conferences along with the local government, screened a documentary and prepared a caravan tour across Spain to get to know firsthand experiences from refugees and asylum seekers.

3.3 Including refugees and migrants in local social services

The local government of Cádiz organised services provided to refugees and migrants through the Delegation of Social Services. The 2019-2022 Action Plan acknowledges the normative framework that provides Spanish cities with the space to act on matters related to migrant reception. Although the services and resources allocated are not as abundant, structured, and targeted as in cities such as Barcelona or Bilbao, the municipal government has shown more commitment towards them than previous administrations. This is especially evident after the 2015 start of the CM government, when the Delegation was criticized for being too bureaucratic (Interviews). This situation changed over time, providing more space for this department to act on matters related to refugees and migrants. The Delegation became a reference point for some actions taken regarding these groups.

Shelters for all residents

There are several examples of such involvement. During the current administration, the local board to fight homelessness recommended investing in day and night shelters for those in a situation of social exclusion. The approach explicitly included transit migrants who needed a place to stay. Although such an approach may not seem revolutionary, for a city like Cádiz this meant a qualitative leap in its approach to homeless residents. This situation was especially relevant during COVID—19 lockdowns. The local government also signed an [agreement](#) with the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR) to operate a shelter for undocumented migrant women.

The local government has also taken an active role through actions aiming at offering temporary refuge to transit migrants following sea crossings. One of the most salient cases occurred in June 2018, when migrants arrived by boat to the shores of Cadiz. In this situation, the local government coordinated actions with local organisations and the Red Cross to offer temporary shelter to 47 migrants in [El Cano Nautic Club](#). These actions included advice, clothing, food, communication services, and transportation to go to other destinations. Another salient case occurred in July 2018, just one month after the first, as hundreds of migrants arrived by boat to the shores of Cádiz. Mayors in southern Andalusia offered municipal buildings to host the newcomers. The local government offered [La Mirandilla Pavillion](#) to host 100 migrants, who were attended by the Red Cross and local organisations.

Although social services in the city seem to be geared towards emergency situations; still more social infrastructure targeting resident immigrants is necessary. Although [the 2019 CM political manifesto](#) included proposals for more resources to promote specific services for migrants, they still do not seem to be in place. Local activists working on social justice and inclusion criticise local administration's passive role in expanding services provided to the immigrant population under the city of refuge label. However, city officials complain there is not enough national support in this policy area.

4. Advocacy and network activities

Cádiz is a transit city traditionally exposed to migration coming from Northern Africa. However, the political commitment of the progressive government elected in 2015, its mayor, and the consensus among relevant social forces in the city facilitated developing a proactive position in defending refugees and vulnerable migrants. In June 2017, the city was officially declared a City of Refuge.

Cádiz became a solidarity city due to a combination of political, social, and geographical factors during and after the so-called European Refugee Crisis. The political one is the most important driver, as the local government of Cádiz has recently placed inclusion and solidarity at the top of its agenda. As for the social factor, the city has developed a relatively strong grassroots movement borne from socio-economic difficulties related to a pervasively high unemployment rate ([31.20% for 2020](#)). Lastly, the location of Cádiz makes it a transit city for migrants as it is the capital of the southernmost province of Spain, near the Gibraltar Strait. The city's position has traditionally exposed it to migrants arriving into Spain through irregular channels.

Progressive mayors can make a difference

The city's leadership in the defence of migrants and refugees has been shaped by mayor José 'Kichi' González Santos. This progressive mayor has pushed for a discourse that asks for a rights-centred approach in the treatment of refugees and vulnerable migrants. His leading voice has joined those of mayors who are critical of the Spanish government and the EU over refugee reception. In fact, the mayor became one of the first ones to publicly promote the Cities of Refuge network formed by progressive Spanish cities in 2015. Although the mayor initially focused on welcoming refugees fleeing war zones such as Syria, his stance has moved to include irregular migrants coming to Europe and especially unaccompanied migrant children.

Founding the Cities of Refuge network

The city's presence in national debates on migration issues has been fairly visible, as it is a founding member of the Spanish network Cities of Refuge. Since the beginning of the European Refugee Crisis, Cádiz has publicly criticized the role of the Spanish government and the EU in enforcing compromises on human rights. The local government has taken several steps in putting forward their position on this topic. For instance, on 23 March, 2016, the municipal council approved a unanimous institutional declaration opposing the EU-Turkey agreement reached in the framework of the refugee crisis. The local government also submitted a public letter addressed to the Spanish and Andalusian ombudsmen on 21 June, 2017, where it demanded the central government develop guidelines implementing the 2009 Asylum Law. By doing so, administrations at the sub-national level can welcome refugees with their own resources.

Solidarity City since 2017

Cádiz officially became a “solidarity city” on 30 June, 2017, when the local council approved the Barcelona Declaration: Cities before the reality of refuge in Spain (In Spanish: Declaración de Barcelona: las ciudades ante la realidad del refugio en el Estado español). By declaring Cádiz a city of welcome, the local government asked the Spanish government to fulfil its commitment in the EU's allocation system of refugees, as well as providing cities with resources so they could prepare for this reality. It is a document in which cities across Spain requested more tools to face the drama of refugees arriving into Spain.

The **Moving Cities** project provides an in-depth research of 28 progressive, solidarity-based cities and their strategies in Europe, exploring their most inspiring and successful local approaches to their migration policies.

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