

**High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges**  
**“Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities”**

18 – 19 December 2018  
Palais des Nations, Geneva

*Concept paper*

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## **1. Introduction**

The eleventh High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges will be held in Geneva on 18 and 19 December 2018 on the theme of “Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities”. This concept paper sets out the focus and objectives for this year’s High Commissioner’s Dialogue, and provides preliminary information on organizational matters. Additional information will be made available on UNHCR’s website: [High Commissioner’s Dialogue 2018](#).

## **2. Background and focus of the Dialogue**

Urbanization has been, and will continue to be, a major demographic trend worldwide. Some 55 per cent of the world’s population live in urban areas, a figure that is expected to increase to 68 per cent by 2050.<sup>1</sup> The role of cities of all sizes in providing protection, shelter, services and access to economic opportunities to all populations continues to grow.

Urbanization is also a fact of life for displaced<sup>2</sup> and stateless populations: more than half of the world’s refugees and more than 80 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in urban areas, while significant numbers of returnees are believed to settle in urban areas upon return to their respective home countries.<sup>3</sup> This makes mayors and city administrations some of the most important stakeholders in the analysis of needs and the planning and delivery of protection, assistance and solutions.<sup>4</sup>

Extensive urbanization, global population growth and large-scale movements of IDPs, refugees and migrants pose a number of challenges to national and local authorities, including urban poverty, social instability and inter-communal tension. In particular, the presence of a large number of displaced people in poor and/or densely populated urban areas can be a challenge, given that they often remain invisible and their specific vulnerabilities unknown. Therefore, concerted city and municipal governance efforts are required to ensure that the necessary social protection systems are in place, which include: facilitating access to services, including to particularly vulnerable individuals; maintaining social cohesion; and harnessing opportunities for social, cultural, technological and economic benefits for all inhabitants.

Global humanitarian and development frameworks recognize the need to find adequate responses to challenges related to growing urbanization. Sustainable Development Goal 11, for instance, seeks to work towards inclusive and resilient cities by 2030. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit saw the

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<sup>1</sup> See UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs ‘World Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision, Key Facts’, available from: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-KeyFacts.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term ‘displaced populations’ is used to refer to refugee, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnee populations noting that distinct protection needs and challenges exist, and different legal frameworks apply.

<sup>3</sup> Global figures for the number of stateless persons, as well as refugee and IDPs returning to urban and semi-urban areas are not available. Returnee monitoring in different regions of the world indicates, however, a strong tendency towards settlement in urban areas due to better access to employment, education and services. See, for example, in Afghanistan: <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/64059>.

<sup>4</sup> See UNHCR ‘UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017, 19 June 2018, p.60, available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5b27be547/unhcr-global-trends-2017.html>

establishment of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, a multi-disciplinary community of different actors seeking to prevent, prepare for and respond to humanitarian crisis situations in urban settings. Shortly thereafter, the Habitat III Conference launched the New Urban Agenda in October 2016, which establishes key global commitments to address development needs in urban contexts and promote inclusivity. The agenda identifies the importance of responding to the specific needs of refugees, IDPs and migrants and acknowledges that while “the movement of large populations into towns and cities poses a variety of challenges, it can bring significant social, economic, and cultural contributions to urban life”.<sup>5</sup>

The global compact on refugees, which will be considered by the United Nations General Assembly at its seventy-third session in 2018, has been developed in consultation with United Nations Member States and other stakeholders following adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and its annex I (the comprehensive refugee response framework) in 2016. The global compact on refugees provides ways for timelier, more predictable and comprehensive responses that engage a wide range of stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> Local authorities and city administrations are often the first responders in humanitarian crisis situations, requiring urgent financial, material and capacity-building support to ensure local institutions are able to respond effectively.

The number of city networks and urban initiatives that has emerged in the past two decades seeking to actively engage in questions of global governance is striking.<sup>7</sup> Cooperative efforts to address the various challenges associated with the arrival of large numbers of displaced people in urban areas have gained impetus, including through the exchange of good practices, toolkits and other inter-city support mechanisms, and find reflection in an increasing number of dedicated fora.<sup>8</sup> Highlighting the important roles that cities play in addressing the needs of refugee, mayors of 17 cities addressed a letter to the High Commissioner for Refugees in December 2017, outlining five key recommendations for more sustained engagement with city and municipal authorities on refugee-related issues, including in the context of global policy-making discussions.<sup>9</sup>

An earlier High Commissioner’s Dialogue, entitled “Challenges for People of Concern to UNHCR in Urban Settings”,<sup>10</sup> organized in 2009, focused on responding to the specific vulnerabilities experienced by populations of concern in urban settings and on better supporting local actors to respond to them, as well as securing protection space in these contexts. The Dialogue built on the Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas,<sup>11</sup> issued in 2009, which set out key principles and measures for UNHCR’s engagement with displaced populations in urban settings, updating UNHCR’s policy on

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<sup>5</sup> See Habitat III: New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador on 20 October 2016, p. 11, para 28: <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/Res/71/1): <http://www.unhcr.org/57e39d987> and the global compact on refugees (A/73/12 (part II)): <https://documents.un.org>

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, The New City Multilateralism, Alyssa Ayres, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 June 2018 available from: <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/new-city-multilateralism>. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum, established in 1995, created a forum for inter-city exchanges on democracy, development and sustainability. Limited to Commonwealth nations, more recent networks such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) founded in 2004, seek to strengthen the role and influence of cities on global governance. A number of more recent city networks were established with the express aim of advancing inter-city exchanges on migration-related issues.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, [Cities of Migration](#); [Cities of Sanctuary](#); [Solidarity Cities](#); [Welcoming Cities](#); [Champion Mayors for inclusive growth](#).

<sup>9</sup> Letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from 17 Mayors, 4 December 2017, available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/5a33d4447.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Further information available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/high-commissioners-dialogue-on-protection-challenges-2009.html>

<sup>11</sup> See the policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, September 2009; available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/hcdialogue%20/4ab356ab6/unhcr-policy-refugee-protection-solutions-urban-areas.html>

refugees in urban areas from 1997. The Dialogue led to the fine-tuning of the policy, the intensification of efforts in several “pilot cities” – including with partners – and the development of a repository of good practices in urban areas with a view to promoting these globally.

This year’s High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges will draw on the outcomes of the 2009 Dialogue and developments that have taken place at global, regional and local levels since then. Discussions will be organized around the following key areas of focus:

- (i) the identification of needs, competencies and profiling of displaced and stateless people in urban settings, including through the use of innovative approaches and methodologies;
- (ii) the role of cities and municipalities in comprehensive responses as envisaged in the global compact on refugees;
- (iii) preventing and addressing violence, social tension and fragility in urban areas for the benefit of displaced populations, stateless persons, and their host communities;
- (iv) identifying and developing solutions for displaced and stateless people living in urban areas and enhancing the resilience of cities and urban areas, first responders and the displaced and stateless people to natural disasters and other humanitarian crises ; and
- (v) engaging with cities as actors of international solidarity.

Six roundtables will be organized with a regional focus (Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East and North Africa) as well as a specific focus (the role of sports in social cohesion, inclusion and wellbeing of refugees; and the role of young displaced persons). In addition, there will be six thematic sessions on: i) service delivery in cities; ii) the role of cities and municipalities in the global compact on refugees; iii) safety and security; iv) supporting solutions; v) the role of the private sector, citizens and communities; and vi) the “cities of solidarity” initiative.

In line with the comprehensive approaches promoted by the global compact on refugees, the 2018 Dialogue will seek to broaden the focus of discussions to encompass both humanitarian and development perspectives and challenges, as well as opportunities for engaging with forcibly displaced and stateless people who live in urban areas. Ways to address the needs of displaced and stateless populations, as well as those of the host communities will also be examined. A broad range of stakeholders will be invited to contribute and participate.

### **3. Objectives of the Dialogue**

The High Commissioner’s Dialogue will:

- Recognize the **important role of municipal authorities and city networks in protecting and assisting refugee, internally displaced and stateless populations in urban areas**;
- **Take stock of existing inter-city support measures and commitments**, as well as best practices, guidance and tools that have been developed and that could be made available to all relevant stakeholders operating in urban environments;
- Explore the engagement of cities in the **implementation of the global compact on refugees**;
- Identify areas for **greater city and municipal engagement in the context of comprehensive refugee responses**, including in the areas of reception and admission; meeting needs and supporting displaced people and local communities; identifying solutions for displaced people in urban areas; mechanisms for burden- and responsibility-sharing, as well as preparing for and responding to future challenges and opportunities;
- Support the advancement of evidence-based, effective **national and municipal-level policy-making and programming for urban areas hosting displaced people**, including by exploring the application of participatory approaches, sharing of good practices and exploring possibilities for further collaboration and cross-fertilization.

#### **4. Participants**

Invitations are being extended to Member States, international and intergovernmental organizations, refugees and host community representatives, as well as mayors, representatives of municipal authorities, city networks, the private sector, international financial institutions, national and local non-governmental and civil society organizations, ombudspersons, faith leaders and academics.

#### **5. Methodology**

UNHCR will prepare a background note to support discussions and make available other background documents.

The High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, will chair the Dialogue and invite representatives of different segments of the society to engage in an interactive discussion.

To ensure a frank, interactive and productive exchange, the Dialogue will consist of a mix of plenary sessions, thematic sessions and informal roundtable discussions that will allow for more targeted discussions of specific aspects of the different issues at stake.

The Dialogue will conclude with the High Commissioner's summary and recommendations focused on two areas in particular: (i) how cities and municipal authorities can contribute and share their expertise and experience in the protection and assistance of refugees in urban contexts to global refugee policy-making processes, deepening and nuancing existing engagement at the national level, as well as with each other; and (ii) the role of cities, municipal authorities and other relevant actors in the context of comprehensive refugee responses.

*UNHCR*

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