

**High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2018:
“Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities”**

18 & 19 December 2018

Thematic Session 3: The global compact on refugees: the role of cities and municipalities

Summary

Cities and local governments play a fundamental role in receiving, welcoming and including refugees into their communities. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) expressly recognizes their vital role in protecting and assisting refugees in urban settings and notes the central role of local authorities in multi-stakeholder approaches. Participants underlined the importance of seeing refugees as assets and the benefits of inclusive policies and approaches for urban communities. This session focused on how stakeholders can engage with cities in comprehensive refugee responses and, more specifically, how they can support cities’ efforts to include refugees within their communities. It built on recent events where mayors and local authorities committed to supporting the implementation of the Compact, including the 2018 annual summit of the Global Parliament of Mayors.

The following key issues were raised:

1. Cities are already implementing the Compact

Cities are supporting the self-reliance of refugees by enabling their social, economic and cultural inclusion. Examples were given of cities facilitating inclusion in education systems, providing psychosocial support and extending entrepreneurial training to displaced communities. The city of Escazú, Costa Rica, which calls itself the ‘city of inclusion’, is illustrative of initiatives being taken at the local level to find solutions for refugees. Participants highlighted the importance of the international community supporting the efforts of cities, including capturing and sharing good practice, generating an evidence-based practice for urban displacement and providing financial and technical support.

2. Partnerships are critical to the success of the Global Compact on Refugees

The humanitarian and development challenges resulting from the arrival of refugees cannot be faced by national governments or municipalities alone. Participants recognized that cities need to work together, as well as with a broad range of other actors at the local, national, regional, and global level. Numerous examples were given of effective partnerships between municipalities, civil society and the international community. One such example is the model established in Thessaloniki to coordinate efforts to support reception and integration-oriented initiatives for refugees, with a view to facilitating their self-reliance in the mid- to long-term. Other examples of innovative city partnerships include the joint refugee task forces established in the Netherlands, efforts to work jointly with non-governmental organizations in Sweden and the shift towards an out-of-camp policy in Ethiopia, enabling greater refugee self-reliance. Participants highlighted the need for platforms that would facilitate interaction between national and local authorities.

3. City participation is vital

Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring city and refugee participation in national and international decision-making bodies, including fora such as the Global Refugee Forum, the first of which will be held in December 2019. Small and medium-sized cities in particular were perceived as often removed from important discussions, despite often being strongly affected by displacement. Their inclusion and participation in such fora, as well as that of refugee youth, was seen as critical to showcasing some of the excellent work that is underway. It was suggested that intermediary bodies at the regional level may provide a means of engaging smaller cities and communities.



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Participants further noted ongoing work in support of integration measures and noted the need for greater engagement of stakeholders at the national, regional and international level, to enable cities and municipalities to further develop good practices. The GCR was viewed as providing an opportunity for greater collaboration between relevant entities in the context of the whole-of-society approaches envisaged by the Compact.