

MAYORS FORUM FOR INCLUSIVE CITIES IN NORTH AFRICA OUTCOMES REPORT



**THE FIRST VIRTUAL CONVENING OF ITS KIND IN THE SUB-REGION
HIGHLIGHTING THE ROLE OF CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES IN RESPONDING TO
DISPLACEMENT**

10 AND 11 NOVEMBER 2020

UNHCR MENA REGIONAL BUREAU

OVERVIEW

The Mayor's Forum for Inclusive Cities in North Africa was held on Tuesday 10 and Wednesday 11 November bringing together mayors, municipality authorities and civil society organisation representatives from major refugee hosting cities in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Mauritania. The forum was hosted by UNHCR under the supervision of the Mayor of Tunis and aimed to build a common platform of good practices and learning among cities and with UNHCR, on the challenges and opportunities facing sustainable policy design and operational for inclusive cities.

This is the first forum of its kind for UNHCR in the region and such engagement with municipal authorities is of extremely high importance, as the role of cities hosting large numbers of uprooted persons in providing protection, shelter, services and access to economic opportunities to all populations continues to grow. This is particularly apparent in the sub-region where population movements, irregular mixed flows, and protracted displacement have challenged already highly urbanized regions and densely populated cities. The first day included two thematic sessions on the role of cities in implementing the GCR and the impacts of refugee influxes and inclusive socio-economic responses. Discussions on the second day focused on city level policies and programs that promote diversity and social inclusion as well as localised approaches to promote livelihoods, support self-employability and entrepreneurship.

Highlights

- Examples of city pledges made at the GRF were shared as well as the support mechanisms available to unify cities and give coherence to their efforts to contribute international processes.
- The lack of resources for cities to respond to refugee needs was a key concern raised throughout the forum. International organisations were called upon to support cities in terms of funding, diplomacy, policy and legal frameworks, and the coordination of different actors.
- It was emphasised that United Cities and Local Governments and UNHCR are working at the global level to link cities up directly with funding opportunities. In addition, the pledges made at the GRF are now going through a process of identifying funding opportunities to support the pledge. Participating authorities were encouraged to develop a joint pledge from the region as one of the outcomes of the forum.
- The absence of a legal frameworks to govern migration and refugee policies was identified as a key challenge where cities need greater support from and coordination with UNHCR to develop a clear framework, deliver training and capacity building, efficiently share resources, and advise on the implementation of the GCR.
- It was noted that municipalities lack employment mechanisms for the economic integrations of refugees and asylum seekers. The need for the economic integration of displaced persons in a way that relates to local production needs was highlighted as an opportunity to enhance social inclusion. Recommendations were shared from UNHCR and civil society organisations to promote economic inclusion and engage the private sector in providing employment opportunities for refugees and host communities alike.
- Several authorities reiterated their commitment to the GCR and the GCM and recognised the 'whole of society' approach and partnerships as key to protecting refugees within their jurisdictions. COVID-19 highlighted the important role that civil society actors and the different stakeholders play in protecting and delivering services to refugees, specifically considering the significant role of the private sector in the pandemics response.
- Despite the enormous pressure that COVID-19 has put on municipalities it was noted that the crisis presented opportunities to scale up coordination mechanisms and information systems;

enhance the understanding of refugees' status and needs; and reinforce partnerships with civil society and international organisations.

- Discrimination and non-inclusion affect our communities on different levels and act as a challenge for achieving social cohesion, sustainable development and civil peace. The practices used by the cities can be an example for good practices for the integration and diversity of displaced persons in hosting communities.
- Cities described the ways in which partnerships have supported their efforts to include refugees.
- The role that cities and municipalities play in fostering a positive public attitude towards refugees and countering discrimination and miss-information was highlighted. Local authorities are disseminating anti-discrimination messages and supporting cultural activities offer to promote social inclusion and cultural exchange.
- Cities and civil society organisations shared good practices including training and vocational courses; the development of action plans for the inclusion of refugees and migrants; and collaborations between municipalities, civil society and human rights organisations; and city level engagement with the private sector to engage refugees economically.

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Cities identified the following common challenges throughout the forum for responding to refugee and asylum seeker needs and advancing inclusive policies and approaches within their jurisdictions.

- Lack of resources and financial support for inclusive practices and services, and in some cases a lack of state support to municipalities to respond to refugee influxes;
- Regional instability, large refugee influxes and mixed migration flows;
- Lack of a legal framework for addressing the needs of migrants and refugees;
- Heightened pressure on services, shelter, and livelihoods as a result of the COVID-19 crisis;
- Lack of preparedness to respond to emergency situations such as COVID-19 or sudden influxes of refugees;
- Social cohesion in the context of heightened competition for limited resources;
- Gaps in information and data on displacement flows and conditions of displaced persons in local contexts;
- Institutional fragmentation of the responsibility of displacement;
- Securitised approaches to displacement and humanitarian responses;
- Insufficient political will and the tension between decentralization and centralization of authority.

SHARED BEST PRACTICES

1. Provision of Services and Inclusive COVID-19 Responses

- The city of **Ain Guezzam** in Algeria provides shelter in reception centres and psychological support services to displaced persons. During COVID-19 and during the recent floods, refugees were included in the city's response through the provision of food assistance and aid.
- **Nouadhibou** in Mauritania provides displaced persons with support through food aid, cash assistance, health and education services.

- In cooperation with UNHCR Tunisia, training and vocational courses were organized in Tunisian cities to identify the needs of refugees and facilitate the provision of municipality services. This was critical in building the capacity of municipalities to implement programs that support refugees which were particularly important during the pandemic.
- The municipality of **Zarzis** in Tunisia provides assistance through the registration of new-born children in displaced families and supports burial of the deceased. The city has partnered with local hospitals for those in need, inclusive of the refugee community. Refugees and asylum seekers also have access to education and sports centre was open for the refugee population.



Signing of a partnership agreement with Medicines au Mondes and the International cooperation for Sustainable Development to assess and respond to the needs of African refugees in Zarzis.

- In **La Marsa**, Tunisia, the on-set of COVID spurred the establishment of a coordination committee to provide food and cash assistance for both the host and refugee communities. This involved mass distributions of food aid and an upscaling of health services, with a focus on pregnant women and children. It is estimated that nearly 1, 800 displaced persons benefited from this assistance. The municipality also supported with rent payments to avoid eviction and a rise in homelessness among the refugee and host populations. It was noted that COVID-19 in fact presented an opportunity to increase the municipality's understanding of, and response to displacement through more accurately capturing the number of displaced persons, their living conditions and challenges. Subsequently, a database was created including the contact details and background information of displaced persons in the city to enable public services to better prioritise assistance.
- **Tunisian Council for Refugees** noted that the registration of new-born children was impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown however cities worked together to track data and facilitate access to registration. In addition, cities in Tunisia have been active in supporting the Tunisian Council

for Refugees throughout the pandemic through fundraising campaigns and distribution of food aid and cash assistance.

- In **Sosa**, Tunisia, efforts were unified through a local committee managed by the municipality and in collaboration with the Tunisian Council for Migration to coordinate support families most impacted by COVID-19. The lack of information on the displaced population was identified as a key barrier in the response, which spurred the municipality to develop a joint database and conduct surveys to collect information on their conditions and challenges.

2. 'Whole of Society' Multi-stakeholder Approaches

- The government of Morocco was the first in MENA to launch the National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum (NSIA), which sets out mechanisms of response to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. The policy which aims to guarantee refugees' socio-economic inclusion in the country, was adopted in 2013 and was endorsed by his Majesty the King in recognition of the need for a whole of society approach to addressing displacement. In Morocco, state institutions, civil society organizations, human rights organizations and UNHCR are collaboratively engaged in the response to the challenging mixed migration context. During the pandemic [his Majesty called on all institutions](#), including the medical entities to ask them to stand together in the face of COVID-19, opening healthcare services refugees and migrants equally.
- **Oujda** municipality in Morocco developed an action plan for the inclusion of refugees and migrants where concerted efforts have been made to engage civil society actors and refugees themselves in the development and implementation of city-level planning. Such participatory approach enabled the municipality to more comprehensively understand the issues that refugees and migrants face and plan accordingly. The city has been successful in increasing the awareness of the situation for refugees and migrants through for example capacity building activities and the development of a regularly updated common platform to disseminate information.
- During COVID-19 despite the challenges, **La Marsa** witnessed solidarity between communities and a reinforcement of partnerships between civil society and international organisations. [A significant achievement was the signing on of 61 associations and civil society organisations for coordinating the response to displacement.](#) The partnership with Doctors of the World was a key success in delivering services to both the host and refugee community.
- **Arab Institute of Human Rights and the Municipality of Tunis** partnered to develop an abandoned space into a community centre.
- As an example of private sector engagement to meet the needs of displaced populations, in 2020 [UNHCR and the National Council of the Medical Association in Morocco signed an agreement](#) to promote health services access for refugees and to fight against the spread of COVID-19. This will provide consultations with volunteer doctors across various specialities to refugee and asylum seeker populations.
- The city of **Rabat** developed partnerships with UCLG, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Morocco, UN Habitat, European Union, private sector and other stake holders with the aim of advancing sustainable development and increasing social cohesion. The city has also been engaged in a project for the Council of Mayors; different awareness and outreach campaigns

with European Union; dissemination of medical campaigns for both refugee and host community populations; and the delivery of vocational courses and education for displaced children and adults.

- **United Cities and Local Governments** UCLG’s primary aim is to bring the global agendas down to the local authorities and to bring the locals perspectives to the global arena. To advance this UCLG established a global task force on migration and refugee issues and is also a member of the Steering Committee of the Mayor’s Mechanism. [The Mayor’s Mechanism](#) was established as a tool for dialogue between states, local and regional governments as well as civil society actors to discuss not only the common priorities on migration and refugee issues, but also potential strategic partnerships. At the UCLG World Congress in Durban, the Mayors' Mechanism of the Global Forum for Migration and Development launched a [Call to Action](#) to consolidate and highlight the role of local authorities in the governance of migration and in the follow-up of the Global Compacts. The Call to Action has proven to be an efficient tool to unify and give coherence to the efforts of cities to contribute to the international process. UCLG and UNHCR are working at the global level to link cities up directly with funding opportunities and support cities to make GRF pledges with the potential to be matched with funding opportunities.

3. Economic and Social Inclusion

- **In Raoued, Tunisia**, art initiatives have been used to communicate messages to the community to counter anti-refugee sentiment.



- **Association thissaghna pour la Culture et le développement ASTICUDE**, in Morocco, implemented an initiative in collaboration with the **City Council of Nador**, the Ministry of Migration, the Agency of the Orient, UNHCR, IOM and UN Habitat, which focused on promoting and supporting creative initiatives to promote social cohesion between the refugee and host community. The initiative included cultural, sports, educational, and artistic activities that took place throughout a week in celebration of World Refugee Day. The model was subsequently transferred to other cities, with the emphasis that partnerships were critical to its success.



To promote intercultural dialogue and the social integration of migrants, the ASTICUDE association organized on Saturday October 17, 2020 a seminar on "Migration and inclusive cities"

- Since 2019 the **Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability** has been supporting [projects promote employment of displaced persons](#). The private sector in collaboration with municipalities have engaged in this process of matching capacities with employers to enhance the economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. There are currently have 700 requests from refugees seeking work and the association is working to secure them with long-term employment through matching and supports job seekers with capacity building programs to prepare for work. For refugees and asylum seekers who are interested in establishing their own enterprise, the association provides assistance throughout the legal process. As a result of such for the association has achieved:
 - Coordination between enterprises and refugees where 100+ refugees were provided with contracts;
 - Establishing the matching process between refugees and asylum seekers and employers;
 - Provision of shelter and services to those in need through collaboration with municipalities; and
 - The founding of a new enterprise by refugees.

- **l'Association Marocaine d'Appui à la Promotion de la Petite Entreprise (AMAPPE)** in Morocco is an association that [supports enterprises founded by women and youth for their socio-economic inclusion in the community](#). The priority is starting projects that employ refugees; 793 small projects are currently active where 160 refugees have been provided employment. AMAPPE work with the private sector and other civil society actors to facilitate local market inclusion of refugees and provide capacity building support to refugees in-line with market demands. civil society. This work was facilitated by legal frameworks for enterprises that include refugees and asylum seekers, and local authorities also provided refugees with six-month internships to develop their professional skills.



As part of the Amuddu project 'For better access for migrant and refugee people to existing guidance and vocational training mechanisms', funded by ENABEL and implemented by AMAPPE. AMAPPE organised a workshop on the vulnerability of migrants' apprentice from vocational training eligible to receive a monthly scholarship throughout the school year in the presence of the delegated Ministry responsible for MRE and Migration Affairs, National Mutual Assistance, civil society actors, and migrants' associations.

- **Nouadhibou** in Mauritania has worked to include refugees coming from Northern Mali economically and socially through vocational professions such as carpentry and trade. As an example, in the trade of dry fish the municipality supports refugees with documents and has supported the legal conditions to open these work opportunities to the refugee community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section compiles the wealth of recommendations from participating mayors, municipality authorities and civil society organisations which provide important direction for UNHCR and other humanitarian and international organisations seeking to more comprehensively support localised refugee responses.

1. Recommendations for international organisations

- With the absence of a legal framework to govern migration and refugee policies, further cooperation is needed from UNHCR to curate a clear framework for implementing the GCR at the local level. A common migration and asylum-seeking strategic framework could better guide municipalities and cities in responding to displacement and addressing refugee needs.
- Advocacy should be focused on establishing national legal frameworks and strategies to respond to displacement.
- Efforts to highlight the role of cities in the inclusion of refugees should be continued and enhanced to advocate for cities to have a greater role in policy making and design.
- The international community should strengthen partnerships with municipalities and channel support to cities to develop infrastructure and services. There is also a need for more coordination between UNHCR and all stakeholders to ensure that knowledge and resources are being shared in the most efficient way.

- Investment and development should be directed to countries of origin to support regional stability.
- There is a for training and capacity building to better respond to displacement on the local level. It is important to design capacity building programs that are specific to the needs of the municipalities. This could involve the development of a common platform to provide assistance on legal, social and economic inclusion, and also facilitate joint organization of cultural and religious events.
- More partnerships should be developed between UNHCR and the private sector to support employment and economic empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Experience sharing is highly valuable, with a notable emphasis on creating more opportunities for cooperation between countries, cities, and other actors in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. A platform should be established and supported for major refugee hosting cities across the region to discuss challenges, share best practices and promote inter-city partnerships.
- UNHCR should facilitate and support an annual forum to design local strategies for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. The forum can give the opportunity for the relevant municipalities to discuss investment priorities which ensures the benefit of refugees and meeting the needs of the local population. The forum should also include international organizations and development actors to better coordinate with municipalities and provide strategic planning for meeting the socio-economic needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

2. Recommendations for inclusive city practices

- Refugee issues should be integrated into legal and administrative practices at all levels of governance.
- Local governments should advocate where possible for the establishment of national frameworks and strategies to respond to displacement.
- Economic integration of displaced persons in a way that responds to local production needs will produce important opportunities for social inclusion.
- In developing migration specific policies, a multi-stakeholder approach should be adopted and importantly should ensure the involvement of the host community and seek advice and participation from refugees and migrants themselves.
- Cities should develop a mapping of civil society actors to be strategic in partnerships and joined up action.
- Legal frameworks for the combatting human trafficking, protection of women rights, and combating discrimination increases the protection of vulnerable individuals.
- Create a database on refugees and asylum seekers including their capacities, skills and available projects in the local context.
- Implement cultural initiatives that aim at integrating displaced youth and cultural exchange.
- Major refugee hosting cities could create a network for the development and progression of legal frameworks that integrate refugees into the society.
- Municipalities and local authorities can lead through their messaging to assist in combating misinformation, racism, and xenophobia to strengthen community solidarity in all COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.
- [Report: Engaging with Employers in the Hiring of Refugees](#) provides a ten-point action plan for employers, refugees, civil society and governments in supporting employment of refugees in the private sector.
- The [Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees](#), offers practical guidance to policymakers and development partners on entrepreneurship development in refugee and migrant settings.

OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

There were several key outcomes of the forum on which point to the next steps in engagement, communications, and planning between UNHCR and participating cities.

1. Participating cities can sign [UNHCR's Cities #WithRefugees Solidarity Statement](#) to highlight the vital work that cities can do. The solidarity statement was launched in 2015 and as of today has over 250 city signatories in 50 countries.
2. UNHCR will share the best practices collected during the forum through the GRF digital platform to show what burden and responsibility sharing looks like on the ground in practice. Though highlighting these practices with the international community, it is hoped that they can be strengthened, scaled up and replicated by other communities to keep the momentum on responsibility sharing and implementation of the GCR. If participating municipalities would like to update, elaborate on, or add additional practices they are encouraged to provide additional input into the attached matrix to ensure they are accurately captured in UNHCR advocacy and communications. Cities and civil society organisations are also able to upload their best practices of GCR implementation directly to the GRF digital platform: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/share-good-practice>
3. The following joint pledge is presented to participating cities:

The cities participating in the First Mayor's Forum on Inclusive Cities in MENA (North Africa) held on 10-11 November 2020 agree to foster stronger sub-regional collaboration and networking on enhancing refugee inclusion in their communities, including through continued access to services such as health, education, access to financial inclusion and employment opportunities, as well as in the arts, culture and athletic activities. Participating cities agree to design an action plan for cross-learning, knowledge-sharing initiatives, good practice dissemination and other forms of collaboration. Additionally, participating cities commit to work towards involving refugee communities through a participatory approach in the design of public policies and responses. They also commit to work with host communities on allowing the contributions of refugees to be well recognized.

For those municipalities wishing to sign on to the pledge please sign the attached pledge document and submit to jorrbmpu@unhcr.org

4. UNHCR will submit the pledge to the GRF platform and release a press statement highlighting it's significance as the first city pledge to come from the MENA region.
5. By way of implementing the above pledge participating cities are encouraged to put forward individual or joint proposals that enhance the social and/or economic inclusion of displaced populations in their jurisdictions. UNHCR will in turn endeavour to investigate ways through which it can support existing efforts and proposed initiatives with knowledge, human and financial resources.
6. UNHCR will commit to facilitating and supporting an annual Mayor's Forum and aim to broaden the scope of participating to include private sector and development actors to enhance investment opportunities in support of inclusive practices, as well as cities from the Middle East and across the Mediterranean.