



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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

18 & 19 December 2018

Roundtable on Middle East and North Africa

Summary

This roundtable examined the challenges refugees and other displaced populations face in urban settings across the Middle East and North Africa region. Participants discussed the critical role cities and municipalities play in addressing the needs of displaced populations and the ways in which other stakeholders including UNHCR and civil society can provide support to relieve pressure on host communities.

The following issues in particular were highlighted:

1. Municipalities and local authorities play a crucial role in protecting persons of concern to UNHCR in urban areas

Municipalities and local authorities are best placed to address the needs of refugees given the former’s access to information and proximity to communities. Moreover, municipalities hold a responsibility to guarantee the basic rights of refugees, which allows them to live in dignity. Participants highlighted two examples of municipalities and local authorities that provide protection and critical services to refugees and other displaced persons despite their limited capacity and resources. The Municipality of Amman has invested in sports and cultural infrastructure in support of refugees. It has built soccer fields and other entertainment facilities within refugee camps and also established a Taekwondo academy in Al-Azraq camp, allowing refugees to participate in championships across Jordan. In Tunisia, where around 1 million refugees from Libya have been hosted since 2011, municipalities have provided access to education and health services for refugees. Additionally, Tunisian authorities are in the process of finalizing a national asylum law that will enhance refugee protection in the future.

2. Mental healthcare services should be incorporated into healthcare packages

Participants discussed the impact on mental health and wellbeing, due to challenges that refugees face in urban settings, and provided examples of good practices in addressing mental healthcare needs. Some of the challenges highlighted include: limited protection, restricted access to asylum-related information and resettlement opportunities, discrimination, limited access to the formal job market and risk of exploitation within the informal market.

In view of such challenges, tailored psychosocial services should be provided as part of healthcare packages for refugees to mitigate the impact on their mental healthcare. For example, the Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo, where staff are 90 per cent well-trained refugees – is available round the clock and is divided into teams that support refugees through provision of information, crisis intervention, psychosocial support, as well as by accompanying individuals to ensure they receive the services they require.

3. Holistic refugee inclusion programmes should incorporate gender, diverse abilities, age and other diversity considerations to meaningfully address specific needs of refugees

Refugee women and girls are particularly at high risk of early marriage, sexual exploitation, domestic violence and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. In view of this, participants stressed the significance of disaggregated data and incorporation of gender, ability status, age and legal status considerations in developing holistic refugee inclusion programmes. For example, ABBAD works in refugee camps in Lebanon, collecting data on the ground for programmes in direct contact with refugee women within the camps.