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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

Thematic Session 1: Meeting the needs of the displaced in urban areas

Summary

This thematic session sought to highlight the specific challenges in meeting the needs of displaced people living in cities, while highlighting broader problems of urban poverty, as captured in sustainable development goal 11.

Participants spoke about strategies and approaches that could be drawn on by cities and municipalities, supported by humanitarian and development actors, to effectively meet the basic needs of displaced people living in urban areas. There was a particular emphasis on multi-sectoral responses and area-based approaches to improve access to services and systems for all urban residents, including displaced populations. The inclusion of displaced people in existing social basic services and systems and the role of civil society and informal actors in identifying and responding to the needs of the most marginalized urban residents, including the displaced, was also discussed.

The following issues in particular were highlighted:

1. Basic needs in urban areas need to be understood and responded to holistically

The basic needs and requirements of displaced people in different urban contexts are often similar and include: physical safety, (including shelter in various forms) as well as access to basic services (including psycho-social support) and documentation. The example of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Erbil, Iraq, was specifically discussed in this regard.

Participants agreed that responses needed to be **contextually specific**, rather than uniform, and take into account the diversity of people and interdependent needs in urban areas. In particular, **age, gender and diversity** must be considered and more effort made to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalized of the urban displaced are identified and have **meaningful access** to targeted services. A particularly important aspect is to address the specific needs of refugees, including in the areas of documentation and legal status, language and communication, access to livelihoods, housing solutions and education, while seeking to enhance their inclusion in existing national systems,.

Given the complexity of urban response contexts, it was agreed that appropriate needs assessment tools should be used as a starting point for community engagement and area-based responses, which build on existing structures and services. This would facilitate the identification of the most relevant entry point(s) and allow programming to expand from there.

2. Local leadership must be inclusive and responses should benefit all urban residents

Local leaders have a primary responsibility in ensuring the well-being of their diverse constituents, including host populations, refugees, IDPs and migrants. In this respect, elected local leaders play an important role in setting the tone for local debates. They ensure success through demonstrating openness and ensuring access to rights and locally available services through municipal structures, while fostering peaceful coexistence with host communities. Participants agreed that if messages of solidarity and peaceful co-existence are to be successful, equitable assistance in urban areas must be ensured. This could be achieved through initiatives, which ensure accrued benefits for whole communities, rather than just the displaced. Targeted responses, which respond to the needs of the most vulnerable members of both displaced and host communities, should also be pursued. Favourable international instruments,



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such as the Global Compact on Refugees and the comprehensive refugee response framework, as well as national legislation and protection frameworks, support the work of municipalities. Participants noted, however, that it is often local leaders who turn these policies into concrete action.

3. The power of civil society must be harnessed, while leveraging technology and social media to ensure [better] access to information

The dynamic interaction between host and displaced communities is crucial for peaceful coexistence. Participants discussed the importance of fostering civil society participation at all levels, through community and private sector engagement, as well as that of non-governmental organizations. Physical and/or socio-cultural barriers to integration need to be addressed. Spatial segregation can be overcome through inclusive planning and decentralized housing, while socio-cultural separation can be addressed through activities encouraging cultural exchange, tailored learning initiatives and information-sharing in relevant mother-tongues. The spatial, social and cultural integration in diverse neighbourhoods in Altena, Germany was discussed as an example in this regard.

Participants also highlighted the importance of information, as misinformation can increase protection risks. Displaced people require accurate information to make informed decisions and access services. It was recommended that information must be accessible in mother tongue languages, and in formats which consider varying literacy levels. UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council's efforts towards providing information in different mother tongue languages, as well as International Rescue Committee (IRC) programmes, were raised as examples.

Knowledge exchanges, including those facilitated by global networks, can create new opportunities for demonstrating solidarity and sharing responsibility, and can support best practice development. Participants agreed that this would require effective information-management and ethical data-sharing frameworks.

4. Political will and commitment across scales, time and sectors is key

Participants agreed that local authorities and civil society were not in a position to achieve results alone. Urban responses have to be supported by national and global policy frameworks and matched with adequate financial resources. In this respect, ensuring the complementarity of humanitarian and development funding instruments, which in turn support the achievement of mid- to long-term results, was highlighted as a key factor for success. From the onset of a response, programming must consider the transition from humanitarian to development assistance and how this can be achieved. The European Commission's move from emergency assistance towards social safety nets were considered as an example. While camp settlements will remain part of the humanitarian landscape, it is possible to mitigate future problems and pave the way for sustainable communities by ensuring the connectedness of camps with existing social and physical infrastructure.

Achieving results in urban areas requires a collective commitment and "whole of society" approach, which rests on joint partnerships between the public, private, development and humanitarian sectors.