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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”

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Thematic Session 4: Supporting self-reliance in urban areas: economic inclusion, access to livelihoods and the role of the private sector

Summary

Cities, local governments, international institutions and the private sector are undertaking extensive efforts to promote the self-reliance of displaced people in urban environments and to facilitate their inclusion in local markets and economies. There are both opportunities and challenges around economic inclusion; efforts are being made to enhance the role of the private sector in working with city authorities, for example, to respond to influxes of displaced populations and emerging needs in receiving communities and markets.

1. An enabling environment is an essential condition for refugees to become full economic participants in hosting societies

Participants noted that the right to work, freedom of movement, access to national services, the ability to open bank accounts and register businesses are all crucial in facilitating the swift and harmonious integration of refugees into host communities. Policy reforms are important in helping create an enabling business environment that supports the ability of refugees to access jobs, services and finance. Participants highlighted that such policy changes should be market-driven and aim to improve labour mobility more generally. It would be key to engage all relevant Government agencies and institutions, as well as the private sector, when designing such policies. At the same time, in order to ensure that refugees, municipal authorities and the private sector have the necessary information and documentation to understand and access opportunities, it is important that policies and potential reforms seek to simplify existing structures.

2. National systems of hosting countries, especially in low and middle-income countries, need to be strengthened and supported as early on as possible.

Participants underlined that close collaboration between humanitarian and development actors is important in ensuring that refugees and host communities benefit from adequate and timely support and assistance. Early needs assessments are particularly important in this regard. Bilateral and multilateral donor support for initiatives aimed at the inclusion and self-reliance of refugees, as well as minimizing the risks for the private sector, remains key. Examples from the Middle East and elsewhere indicate that these programmes have a positive impact in supporting entrepreneurship and job creation.

3. Private sector actors take on a special responsibility when employing refugees.

Participants encouraged private sector entities to acknowledge the business opportunity in seeing refugees as both potential employees and customers. While refugees often bring important skills, private sector entities may initially be required to shoulder investment costs in order to re-skill or train refugees as needed, and support others who may have special needs. The creation of incentives and provision of subsidies may, in the initial phase, support the engagement of private sector partners in such endeavours.

It was further noted that many companies today recognize the value in aligning with the sustainable development goals, and thereby, to contribute to the development of society. By highlighting examples in Turkey, participants noted the importance of ensuring that refugee employees are recognized and are able to fully participate, including in employee associations and committees. Company-organized



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activities, such as sports tournaments, can further foster internal cohesion between refugee and non-refugee workers.

The creation of new partnerships between government authorities, the private sector and civil society supporting refugee employment is one avenue for making the business case to private sector entities, including those which thus far have not been engaged on these kinds of issues.

4. Changing the narrative around refugees as assets requires robust data and more joint advocacy by the public and private sector actors

Participants noted the multiple positive examples and lessons learnt from programmes and projects in refugee-hosting countries. These need to be showcased more strongly and consistently, to support ongoing advocacy efforts with governments for policy changes. Private sector engagement with refugees and host communities in Ethiopia was mentioned as a good example. In Kenya, the financial inclusion of refugees and the implications for the market place and local host communities more generally also provide good examples. These in turn, can support more targeted advocacy with relevant public and private sector actors.