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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 6: Cities of solidarity

Summary

The “Cities of Solidarity” initiative, as envisaged by the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action, recognizes the central role of cities in welcoming refugees, enabling their enjoyment of social, economic and cultural rights and facilitating their inclusion and integration through the implementation of public policies. The implementation of the “Cities of Solidarity” concept in the Americas over the past 14 years has yielded a wealth of good practices and lessons learnt. These are complemented by the outcomes of regional and global policy dialogues on the role of cities and local governments in facilitating the local integration of displaced and stateless persons in urban environments.

Highlighting examples from large-scale arrival situations to contexts where arrival and integration is facilitated by the Government or sponsored by communities, participants noted the importance of meeting the needs of both refugees and host communities, while managing the public perception of displaced and stateless persons.

1. Socio-cultural inclusion is key

The sudden, large-scale arrivals of refugees has an impact on existing resources, which are often stretched to accommodate the needs of new arrivals as well as those of host communities. Necessary measures facilitating the socio-economic, legal and cultural inclusion of displaced and stateless persons is deemed beneficial in the mid- to long-term, as it results in greater self-reliance and lessens the burden of local authorities. Participants discussed the example of cities in Brazil, which have embraced the arrival of refugees and have sought to create opportunities for their representation at the municipal level.

2. The arrival of displaced persons can rejuvenate cities

Examples from Europe and the United States of America indicate that the arrival of refugees and migrants can have a positive effect on the socio-economic fabric of cities, including cities that were marked by economic depression. Adopting a welcoming attitude was found to not only lead to a greater cohesion between refugees and the host communities welcoming them, but also accelerating economic growth of businesses that can benefit from the greater diversity of skill-sets.

3. Maintaining a culture of welcome requires empathy and resources

Participants highlighted that cities around the world are increasingly engaged in demonstrating international solidarity, including by welcoming and sheltering displaced populations around the world. Participants highlighted examples in South America, where cities have made substantial contributions to global responsibility-sharing by taking in large numbers of refugees. Such acts of solidarity have an impact on local capacity and require adequate levels of financial and other support to be able to maintain the openness and willingness to host those in need.

Participants also highlighted the importance of ensuring close and consistent engagement with host communities to understand and be able to respond to their growing needs, especially in the context of large-scale arrivals. Local goodwill can only be maintained as long as local needs are seriously considered and engaged with. An important element of this is addressing misinformation and proactive communication with affected communities.



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Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that principles of openness are anchored in society to ensure their sustainability beyond election cycles. They suggested that human dignity could prove an important guiding principle for public policy that could assist municipalities around the world to sustain cultures of welcome.