

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

18 & 19 December 2018

Roundtable on Europe

Summary

This roundtable examined the role of municipalities in enhancing social cohesion and harnessing potential opportunities for the successful integration of refugees and other displaced populations in the European context.

The following issues in particular were highlighted:

1) Integration should commence as soon as refugees and other displaced populations arrive, including by ensuring their participation in decision-making processes relating to policies and programmes

Participants underlined that it is essential to start the integration process of refugees and migrants from the very beginning, enabling them to become part of their host community early on. Importantly, integration should go beyond access to housing and labour markets to enable refugees and migrants, particularly youth, to participate in policy decision-making processes. Cities and municipalities play a key role in achieving such meaningful integration. For example, the Municipality of Athens has established the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrants and Refugee Issues (ACCMR), thereby recognizing the need for inclusion of refugee and migrant voices in policy discussions and its significance in their meaningful integration. The ACCMR also brings together major entities serving refugees and migrant, facilitating greater coordination as well as the sharing of experiences and best practices among these stakeholders.

2) Cities can mobilize to enact changes in policies and practices at the national level to boost inclusive service delivery and increase integration of diverse populations, including refugees and migrants in urban areas

Participants highlighted what cities are already doing, and could do more of, to adapt their governance structures, institutions, policies and services to better meet the needs of their diverse populations, particularly refugees and migrants, and enhance their meaningful inclusion in different aspects of urban life. Some municipalities are actively advocating with the central government to remove impediments to the inclusion of refugees and migrants, which are often imposed by policies at the State level. For example, the Municipality of Botkyrka in Sweden, the most diverse municipality in Sweden and a member of the Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe, is undertaking measures to improve the reception and inclusion of refugees. The Botkyrka municipality bears the responsibility to provide welfare services to newly-arrived refugees. However, the configuration of the welfare system at the State level, coupled with limitations at the municipal level, have restricted the capacity of the municipality to reach diverse populations and respond to their needs. In view of this, the Botkyrka municipality is advocating with the central government to develop the welfare system in order to make it more agile and responsive. Additionally, a study has been launched to explore the possibility of establishing a local centre in Botkyrka, bringing together the local administration, academia and civil society in partnership to ensure dignified reception of refugees. The study will be published in May 2019.

3) Cities should create multi-sectoral partnerships to address protection gaps and overcome challenges

Cities face ongoing challenges in integrating refugees and migrants, particularly in terms of capacity and funding. To remedy this, cities should take bold action and find alternative ways to achieve set goals. Establishing public and private partnerships is one effective way for cities to procure the required funding and capacity to better receive and integrate refugees and migrants. For example, the City of



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Athens collaborated with private foundations to secure funds for building the necessary infrastructure for receiving refugees and migrants. Another example is the “Open Schools” program, run in collaboration between the Municipality of Athens and the non-governmental organization Elix, which provides non-formal education and homework support to refugee and migrant children as a way to facilitate their integration into the public education system.