

ANNEX – Note on Protection Working Groups (PWGs)

PWGs are platforms set up by UNHCR, IPs and other CSOs working on human rights and the protection of the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and other people in need of protection (e.g. victims of human trafficking). PWG are not UNHCR's unilateral process but it is rather a consultative process of platform creation; if the field is not ready, UNHCR does not and cannot advance without field volunteers.

Key objectives of the PWGs are coordination and information-sharing, identification and referral of PoC, and provision of assistance to the most vulnerable cases. PWGs, in coordination with UNHCR, support the most vulnerable with cash, education and social and occupational integration, irrespective of their place of residence.

Other actions include capacity-building and awareness-raising among civil society and institutional actors (including law enforcement) on issues related to protection, refugee rights, prevention and response to SGBV, etc. An advocacy strategy around solving protection issues is also one of the objectives of the PWGs and operational standards have been defined for the referral of asylum seekers to the UNHCR office in Rabat.

UNHCR has conducted numerous training sessions and workshops in order to build the capacity of the PWGs. Potential asylum seekers can be identified in different ways by:

- OMDH through its information and awareness-raising activities in the field
- Community workers through their contact with different migrant communities
- Spontaneous presentation of asylum seekers to the OMDH centres in the three cities
- Member associations of the PWGs and other civil society organizations through their field activities
- The Centre d'Assistance Juridique (CAJ) assesses cases in need of international protection and then refers them to UNHCR Rabat, while covering the transport fees

An important part of the outreach work is done by community outreach workers, who are refugees themselves and form an integral part of their community. In a context that is sensitive politically and in terms of security, where UNHCR access is limited, PWGs working in key locations are extremely important in order to enhance outreach capacity towards PoC. This is particularly the case for the North and Oriental regions. Approximately two thirds of asylum seekers registered by UNHCR in Rabat were referred by partners operating in Oujda, Nador and Tangier. The number of cases referred by OMDH rose from 1,476 individuals in 2016 to 2,013 individuals in 2018.

The PWGs have improved partners' coordination and the mobilization of civil society organizations; the local response to refugees' needs has also improved and it is more coordinated in the three cities in which PWGs operate. In Rabat, where most IP HQs are located but no PWG exists, coordination is not as effective as in Oujda, Tangier and Casablanca.