



**UNHCR**

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  
Roundtable on Sports**

**Summary**

This roundtable sought to examine the role of sports in achieving positive social outcomes for displaced populations in urban settings and advancing their integration in host communities.

The following issues in particular were highlighted:

**1. Sport and sports entities have a key role to play in comprehensive refugee responses**

Participants highlighted that sport provides a common framework that all understand regardless of their status within a State. It is a powerful tool that can contribute to refugee inclusion, give hope, improve wellbeing and bridge gaps between refugee and host communities. Moreover, sport can provide opportunities for young people to develop a diverse range of life skills. Refugees often show great desire to participate in sports but are restricted because of the cost or their status, which renders them ineligible to play. Therefore, sports organisations and federations should be encouraged to open up their activities to refugee youth.

Noting the important work of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Olympic Refugee Foundation in this area, the Global Compact on Refugees indicates that partnerships will be pursued to increase access of refugees to sporting and cultural facilities and activities in host communities. For example, since 2017 the IOC has placed all refugee sports activities under the purview of the Foundation, for which the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees serves as the Vice-Chair. The Foundation has launched initiatives in Jordan, Kenya and Turkey and has invited UNHCR to appoint a Deputy Chief of Mission to the Olympic Refugee Team. In addition, the IOC is currently in discussion with its members to encourage them to include more refugee youth in their activities and programmes.

**2. Sport programmes can have a very positive social impact for displaced, stateless and host community youth in cities and urban areas**

Organized sport programmes can improve the psychosocial well-being of youth, including by reducing stress and anxiety, creating an environment to learn discipline and respect for others and providing opportunity to make friends. Sport is also a way for youth in particular, to protect themselves in a context where they are facing threats to their lives and livelihoods. Young people in cities and urban areas have reported increased feelings of safety as a result of their participation in organized sports activities. In addition, participants concurred that sport promotes values, principles and dignity. UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Yusra Mardini, said “people don’t ask me where I am from, they ask me about my game – that’s the amazing value of sport...”.

In addition, participants underscored that including youth from both refugee and host communities in designing sport activities and programmes early on, is key to the success of any initiative. Moreover, a strong relationship with the local or municipal governments from the beginning is essential for promoting host community buy-in and ensuring sustainability, as they can also provide ongoing access to safe spaces. Participants further stressed that municipalities have a special role to play in messaging around the inclusion of refugees and can support positive public perceptions and attitudes in host communities.