

# High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2018: Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities

18 & 19 December 2018

## *Summary report*

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### **I. Background**

Cities and local authorities have long played an important role in extending protection and solutions to displaced and stateless people. By providing safety, services and emergency assistance, cities and local authorities have enabled communities to welcome and support those in need.

Global humanitarian and development frameworks recognize the need to find adequate responses to the challenges presented by forced displacement in urban contexts and to include a focus on the role of cities and local authorities in this regard.

With a view to improving responses to large refugee movements, the General Assembly in 2016 requested UNHCR to lead the development of a Global Compact on Refugees. The Compact builds on UNHCR's long-standing engagement in urban areas and identifies cities and city networks as stakeholders with an important role to play in comprehensive refugee responses.

This context provided the impetus for the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2018 to look at "Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities". The Dialogue focused on the role of cities and local authorities in protecting and assisting displaced and stateless populations.

Some 600 representatives from cities and local authorities, States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, together with experts and refugees, participated in a series of active and constructive conversations, focusing on good practices and suggestions for future action.

This summary report does not necessarily represent the views of individual participants or UNHCR but reflects broadly the themes and understandings emerging from the discussions. It is to be read in conjunction with the summaries for the Dialogue's six thematic sessions and six roundtables.

### **II. Overview of the 2018 Dialogue**

The Dialogue consisted of a mix of plenary sessions, thematic sessions, roundtable discussions and a side event.

- an **opening plenary**, including a high-level panel with Mayors;
- **six thematic sessions** to allow for in-depth interactive discussions on the following themes:
  - i) meeting the needs of the displaced in urban areas;
  - ii) urban conflict and violence;
  - iii) the Global Compact on Refugees and the role of cities and municipalities;
  - iv) supporting self-reliance in urban areas: economic inclusion, access to livelihoods and the role of the private sector;
  - v) harnessing community support for solutions;
  - vi) the "cities of solidarity" initiative": the experience of the Americas.

- **six roundtables** with either a regional focus (Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East and North Africa) or a thematic focus (the role of sports in social cohesion, inclusion and wellbeing of displaced and stateless persons; and the role of young displaced and stateless persons).
- a **side event**, on children and youth, organized by the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council with input from the World Economic Forum.
- a **closing plenary**, with summaries by co-chairs (or elected rapporteurs) from each of the six thematic sessions, followed by concluding remarks from the High Commissioner.

### III. Outcomes of the 2018 Dialogue

Building on the High Commissioner's closing remarks, some key conclusions emerging from the Dialogue include the following:

- The Global Compact on Refugees provides a solid framework for building on the strong affinities between UNHCR, cities and partners. It presents the institutional and political commitment to make such partnerships succeed.
- Cities demonstrate tremendous leadership in welcoming refugees – referred to as an “ecosystem of welcome” by one speaker – which can be further recognized and supported by the international community, including through resources.
- Cities play a crucial role in shaping the narrative around refugees and migrants and are often ideally placed to counter xenophobia and hostility. The international community should support further cooperation and outreach of like-minded cities to those who may be affected by a challenging political environment.
- Inclusion is central to the Compact and fostering the self-reliance of refugees, and cities are in turn central to facilitating such inclusion. This covers inclusion into infrastructure and services, as well as socio-cultural activities such as sports, music and arts. The two-way participation of refugees and host communities in shaping inclusion was stressed, in particular the role of young refugees and young members of host communities.
- We must work together. This applies to global partners but also national and local partners such as businesses, faith leaders, civil society, non-governmental organizations, private citizens, academia and volunteers. Interaction must take place not simply within these different groups but between them, too. This engagement must also transcend levels: from local to global to local and back again.
- Responsibility-sharing is at the heart of the Compact and was key to the two days of discussion. The need for greater national responsibility-‘sharing was stressed – between different cities as well as between the central government and cities – and the idea of both national and local compacts was proposed. National governments, who often have the ability to create the right policies and provide the right resources, are crucial to such efforts.
- The participation of cities in decision-making fora at the global, regional, national and local level was highlighted throughout the Dialogue. There was a concrete proposal to ensure city involvement in the first Global Refugee Forum, to be held in December 2019. One suggestion would be to have city representatives as a part of their government's delegations. Such participation would demonstrate the diversity of response needed to meet the objectives of the Global Compact and show cohesion between the global, national and local level.
- On the issue of city networks, it was clear that these already exist and UNHCR is well-positioned to engage in and guide the discussions of those networks. In particular, UNHCR can seek to forge common approaches, work on bench marks for inclusion, access issues and resources. Through this, UNHCR can contribute to improving the manner in which local and

city governments access international resources, including by drawing on UNHCR's relationships with development organizations and international financial institutions.

- A review of UNHCR's urban refugee policy, in its 10<sup>th</sup> year in 2019, will take place in consultation with stakeholders.