



**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

**Thematic Session 5: Harnessing community support for solutions**

**Summary**

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Local communities in urban areas, including individual citizens, civil society groups and other local actors play an important role in welcoming and supporting displaced and stateless people. Urban displacement can further exacerbate existing economic and social strains caused by urbanization. Often faced with already limited financial resources, local communities worldwide have demonstrated solidarity with displaced persons, including by offering shelter and addressing other basic needs, providing protection and facilitating access to livelihoods. Local communities often also play an essential role in facilitating the reintegration of those returning to places and cities of origin.

The following key messages were highlighted:

**1. Displaced people have diverse needs**

Participants highlighted the broad range of voices among the refugee community and the importance of creating spaces that would allow refugee women and girls, youth and differently abled persons to be seen and heard. Urban environments provide protection, but can also be experienced as deeply isolating and as exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Participants highlighted the importance of being sensitive to these needs and vulnerabilities, especially where they are related to aspects of age, gender and diversity, and of ensuring that equal opportunities are offered. Self-reliance gained as a result of such efforts is often used to give back to the community.

**2. Local host communities play an important role in welcoming displaced people and need to be supported to continue to do so.**

Local communities in urban, as well as rural areas, are often among the first to welcome displaced people into their homes and share their resources. Examples from North and Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrated the important role that host communities play in creating an environment that is supportive of displaced and stateless people. Participants highlighted the value of initiatives that seek to bring local communities and refugees closer together, to better understand their respective challenges and opportunities for addressing these. Making sure that such local initiatives benefit from ongoing efforts at the global level and are linked up, was deemed valuable. This may also help attract additional resources to host communities and support their ability to maintain a culture of welcome in the mid- to long-term.

**3. Private citizens are contributing to global responsibility-sharing**

The cost of hosting displaced people is regularly raised as major concern by countries hosting large numbers of refugees. Participants highlighted the generosity with which many of the local communities support new arrivals, including over extended periods of time. Community sponsorship and initiatives that seek to ‘match’ refugees in urban environments with potential host families, have been effective in providing much-needed protection to some of the most vulnerable individuals, as well as actively contributing to global burden and responsibility-sharing efforts. The experience gained from community-based and -driven projects demonstrates that they have a positive effect on refugees, as well as the communities that they become a part of.

**4. Inclusive policies benefit all urban residents**

Participants noted that the arrival of displaced people in towns and cities can provide an opportunity to improve the protection environment for urban dwellers. Examples were raised from Europe, where the



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arrival of refugees had allowed for a review of existing social welfare policies and protection systems in place and led to the development of more inclusive policies benefiting all urban dwellers.