



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 Solidarity Approaches in Asia

Summary

This roundtable examined solidarity in Asia-Pacific countries and the ways in which the whole of society can be brought together and mobilized to support solutions for refugees and enhance social cohesion in urban settings.

The following issues in particular were highlighted:

1. Solidarity must be community-based, building consensus from the bottom-up to embody the “whole of society” approach

The participants concurred that the comprehensive refugee response framework, Global Compact for Refugees and the sustainable development goals provide important frameworks. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region, regardless if signatories to the 1951 Convention or not, have a long tradition of offering protection and hospitality to people on the move. In Indonesia, for example, a centuries-old tradition of fishermen providing safety to people at sea has been translated into a codified standard of practice that is endorsed by the Government.

Opportunities are most often found in cities, but competition for scarce resources means that large-scale displacement can lead to perceptions that refugees are a burden. However, incentivizing cities to host displaced persons can fundamentally change these perceptions. Governments and other stakeholders should therefore seek a comprehensive matrix of policy interventions. For example, in Afghanistan, policymakers are implementing a framework that allows for a whole-of-community approach to displacement. The allocation of additional resources to cities is based on national priority programs, so that everyone benefits from resources invested in the response. This holistic approach creates a partnership “triangle” between host communities, the government, and displaced communities.

Stakeholders should focus on inclusion and resilience and not ignore the vulnerability of refugees, who often risk falling into isolation in urban settings. Inclusive approaches will help bring people together who offer skills, values and culture that can be nurtured and invested in.

2. Innovative partnerships are key to building resilience and social cohesion and to finding solutions

Solidarity means forming linkages with all stakeholders, including civil society (both local and national), private sector, academia, humanitarian and development actors, host communities and the displaced communities themselves. It also means adopting an integrated and coherent approach to addressing challenges of urban displacement. For example, in Malaysia, UNHCR has partnered with a local banking institution to develop a health insurance scheme for refugees, financed in part by private donations. The Government is also providing space for refugees to develop their own livelihood initiatives through private enterprise and trying to regularize work rights.

Innovative partnerships can be effective for fostering social cohesion, self-reliance and helping develop empathy in host communities. For example, a program for refugee artists in Kuala Lumpur provides a platform for refugees to tell their stories and facilitates rich cultural exchange. Similar programs have been implemented in Adelaide, Australia as well as in western Afghanistan (where the program is named after the Dari word for “empathy”). By drawing on Asia’s tradition of migration and cosmopolitanism, displaced persons are humanized and their capacities highlighted, so that they are understood as more than just people needing charity. Broad-based partnerships also need to address how to best mitigate the impact on national systems in urban areas which host displaced populations.



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3. It is critical to invest in youth, in order to harness opportunities presented by the “youth bulge”

Demographic realities in Asia, particularly displaced populations, cannot be ignored. There must be investment in the human capacity of young people, to give them the skill sets to contribute to host communities where they reside, and to help rebuild their communities upon return. In Pakistan, for example, 65 per cent of Afghan refugees are youth, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Pakistan is planning on introducing reforms aimed at building youth capacity to robustly participate in civic life, through economic, social, and political empowerment.