



THE FIRST MENA ROUNDTABLE ON THE ROLE OF ART AND CULTURE IN ADDRESSING DISPLACEMENT

Amman, Jordan

3-4 December 2019





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SUMMARY

This report reflects some of the highlights from the 'MENA Roundtable on the Role of Art and Culture in Addressing Displacement', which was held in December 2019, Amman, Jordan in the lead up to the first Global Refugee Forum. The roundtable was the first of its kind in the region and aimed to discuss how artists and cultural actors can shape public narratives and expand the space for constructive dialogues, particularly in relation to social cohesion between refugees and host communities. The roundtable provided a platform for over 50 artists and cultural actors to frame their role in issues related to displacement in MENA and share successful practices of promoting refugee inclusion. The discussions highlighted the skill sets and capacities that refugees bring with them through their movement and emphasized the need for refugees to have access to intercultural and artistic engagement within the host community.

The roundtable aimed to critically discuss the following key themes:

a) The role of art and culture in shaping the discourse around displacement, enhancing social cohesion, dispelling myths, reducing xenophobia and discrimination;

b) The role of art and culture as a medium of expression and healing of trauma for refugees, and to promote further research on policy frameworks and coordination mechanisms which support this; and

c) Modalities for systematically identifying and nurturing artistic talent among refugees, and to highlight it as an important contribution to enrichment and diversity in host communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is facing a complex set of inter-related and dynamic challenges including **the biggest displacement crisis since World War II**. The region is affected by protracted instability in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen, with on-going spillover effects into neighboring countries. As a result, most countries in the region remain countries of destination, origin, or transit for population movements. The MENA region currently accounts for 40% of global displacement despite the fact the region represents only 5% of the global population. These patterns of large-scale forced displacement and associated protection needs are compounded by additional economic and environmental related factors that trigger migration of people in search for better opportunities. The intractable nature of the conflicts facing the MENA region mean that refugees' needs in host countries are no longer short-term humanitarian concerns. With severely overstretched essential services and high unemployment rates host countries are confronted with rising social tension between refugee and host communities. The arts and cultural sector have the potential to contribute significantly to addressing refugees' protection needs and easing social tensions in host communities.

Art, music, dance, theatre and literature are powerful means of self-expression to process traumatic experiences and foster a sense of community and cultural connection among communities in exile, something invaluable for children refugees born outside their home countries. In addition, storytelling through art and cultural expression can offer a witness, a critical perspective that has a unique ability to describe lived realities as a compelling and affective response to discriminatory discourses and reductive representations. This has implications beyond hosting countries for responsibility sharing globally. Language and representation matters evidenced in the strategic deployment of political myths around refugees; when people become boats, families become swarms and communities become floods it is harder to see refugees as humans, which impacts how they are treated in hosting and third countries. Art and cultural expression offer a counter to the imbalance of this political mythmaking that dehumanizes refugees. What stories are told, who they are told by and how they are told can lead to demonization of refugees and the erasure of their abilities, potential and humanity.

More than a source of agency for refugees, creativity offers societies more broadly an avenue to rupture with stagnant thinking and imagine alternative solutions. Enhanced partnerships between UNHCR and influencers in the art and culture sector across MENA have proven essential to countering refugee marginalization and reimagining their contribution to host societies. The establishment of **strategic and innovative partnerships with regional artists and cultural actors is a key objective of the MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement (MENA CSND)**. MENA CSND aims to address the calls to strengthen the role of civil society in responding to the crisis by providing a platform for civil society stakeholders to strengthen and amplify their voices and actions in favor of the protection and assistance of displaced persons, and in support of host communities bearing the brunt of the responsibility.

OPENING PLENARY

Senior Policy Advisor and Head of Policy Unit, Shaden Khallaf, contextualized the roundtable with the scale of the current global displacement and the disproportionate responsibility that the MENA region is bearing. The way the world responds to such displacement crises is reflective of how we understand and value human dignity. In December 2018 the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) was adopted aiming to advance international solidarity and responsibility sharing so that major hosting countries are not bearing this



responsibility alone. This recognized the need to move beyond the perception of displacement as a burden and instead see the potential of displaced populations to add value to societies. The outcomes of the roundtable fed into the first Global Refugee Forum in Geneva 17-18 December, which aimed to take stock of what has been achieved in the year since the GCR was adopted.



The MENA region has been working on advancing the ‘whole of society’ approach articulated in the GCR. This approach recognizes that the displacement challenges facing the region and the world today are so immense that they cannot be handled by international players alone; everyone has a responsibility and a role to play in the response. Artists and cultural actors play a critical role in this approach through creative channels to raise awareness, shape constructive narratives, promote refugees’

talents, and engage refugees economically. The art and culture sector can be instrumental in reducing xenophobia, hate speech and discrimination by encouraging curiosity, creativity, and compassion. Giving refugees the opportunity to enrich their intercultural and artistic engagement within host communities can offer alternatives to conceptions of difference and facilitate the cross-cultural sharing of ideas, traditions and beliefs. This work provides a necessary complement to humanitarian work that addresses protection needs, economic empowerment and durable solutions.

THEMATIC SESSIONS

SESSION I PARTNERSHIPS AND THE ‘WHOLE OF SOCIETY’ APPROACH IN MENA

Facilitator:

Ms. Carol El Sayed, UNHCR Lebanon

Speakers:

Ms. Hajer Chehbi (AIDH), Tunisia

Mr. Rachid Badouli (Fondation Orient Occident), Morocco

Ms. Dana Madouh, (Twentytwo11) Kuwait

This session highlighted the importance of the ‘whole of society’ approach framework embodied in the GCR. The GCR provides a balanced approach to displacement with practical steps on how societies can collectively support host communities and help refugees strive at the same time. The practices that actors in the art and culture sector have been engaged in can be shared and built on through the MENA CSND which has been instrumental in advancing the ‘whole of society’ approach in the region.

The role of the marketing sector in shaping public narratives was presented emphasizing the need to communicate the refugee crisis beyond numbers and shift negative perspectives on refugees to tell stories of common humanity. Engaging refugees in art and cultural production offers a way to move beyond the representation of refugees in figures to humanize them as dignified individuals. It was recommended that the artistic work of the host culture not be isolated but used to create collaborative works of art with refugee communities. In this there is great potential for the reactivation of host cultures through engagement with new communities.



“We are capable of sending messages and creating group perceptions that would change the narrative”

– Dana Madouh, Twentytwo11 Marketing Agency, Kuwait

The value of artistic expression was discussed in providing people who are otherwise disengaged from society a way to participate and contribute. Art provides an opportunity for people to manage and express negative emotions and sadness that conflict, loss and displacement engender; it provides a space for more open communication without judgement. In addition, cultural activities instill a sense of identity in communities separated from their land and cultures. Cultural preservation is intrinsically valuable for people’s identities and it helps maintain refugees’ ability to relate to their communities if they are able to safely return home. This is particularly important for refugee children who are growing up with no connection to cultural knowledge.

“Culture is an incubator that includes refugees with their host communities and eliminates discrimination.”

– Rachid Badouli, Fondation Orient Occident, Morocco

Speakers emphasized that with a diversity of cultures, languages and religions it is essential to highlight common interests, shared values and mutual goals among refugees and host communities. Culture is a powerful way for refugees to interact positively with their host communities; culture promotes diversity, addresses discrimination and highlights the talents and skills of refugees. An example of highlighting commonality between refugee and host communities was shared where Iraqi refugees composed and recorded lullabies for their children, which they then shared with host communities. The refugees reported that the recording process was in itself therapeutic, and the project was successful in bringing together women from diverse backgrounds who shared common experiences of putting their children to bed.

“Art can change general opinion and be used to merge refugees into society.”

– Hajer Chehbi, Arab Institute of Human Rights, Tunisia

Speakers highlighted that creating a network of actors from the sector can act as a platform through which they can direct their talents, skills and time in addressing displacement. There remains a need to address misinformation in the region and globally and this work needs to be communicated in a way that people can relate to; art and culture provide a common language for this communication and in doing so can shape the policy sphere. It was recommended that UNHCR and MENA CSND support more cultural activities because they lead to more diversity and greater acceptance, can shape narratives in more positive and human centered ways, can play a role in combating misinformation, and engage refugee and host community talent. In addition, the MENA CSND could do more advocacy with Ministers of Culture to include issues relating to refugees and displacement in their programs and plans of action. This could support a culture of tolerance, acceptance and inclusion in the sector’s work.

Quick Links

Arab Institute for Human Rights: <http://www.aihr-iadh.org/ar/>

Fondation Orient Occident: <http://www.orient-occident.org/>

SESSION II INSPIRATION STATION: SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE SOURCE

Facilitator:

Ms. Shaden Khallaf (UNHCR MENA)

Speakers:

Ms. Shirene Rifai (Jordan Fashion Week), Jordan

Mr. Omar Samra (O2), Egypt

Mr. Omar Nour (O2), Egypt

Ms. Abeer Khreisha, 2019 Nansen Award Middle East Refugee Recipient, Jordan

Participants in this session demonstrated ways in which they use creative and personal ways to engage with the issues of displacement. Three inspirational examples from the region were presented demonstrating the way in which common goals are being pursued through strikingly diverse approaches. Speakers broadly discussed the label refugee as an unhelpful and limiting category that dictates people’s access to certain opportunities irrespective of their capability. The challenge is to rethink how we create identities without putting people in categories that are necessarily hierarchical. Actors in the art and culture

sector need to think critically about how they can use their creative platforms to transcend labels, boxes and stereotypes to reach the humanity of individuals.

O2, two Egyptian adventurers, shared the story of their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in a rowboat, which they turned into the documentary, 'Beyond the Raging Sea' which raises awareness on the global refugee crisis (collaboration with UNHCR, UNDP, DHL and IEFTA). This film drew attention to the journeys in which thousands of refugees lose their lives in search for safety and provides an insight into the fear they experience during this journey. The issue of being desensitized to the refugee story was discussed and the way O2 found an alternative avenue through their own journey to allow people to connect with refugees' plight.



The film's success shows how the art and culture sector is uniquely able to garner broader participation in the displacement crisis; it is a means through which people can believe in the cause. Where global problems are so

large and intractable it is easy for people to lose hope and while there are practical things people can do the challenge remains to communicate these steps and break seemingly impossible challenges into achievable parts.

"Our journey was an adventure we chose. We prepared for months and used a top-of-the-line rowboat, but still, we were scared for our lives when it tipped over 500 miles out at sea."

– Omar Samra, O2

The work of Jordan Fashion Week was another example of incorporating humanitarian angles into an industry to open opportunities for refugee designers. Their work aims to support the development of refugees' skills and promotion of their talents by connecting them with local designers to create a collection for Jordan Fashion Week. The project is designed to recognize the talents that many refugees bring with them to host countries and provide them with the tools and industry access to mobilize them. The project is an example of highlighting the positive contribution of refugees and moving away from a focus on their hardships. In doing so the industry can learn from the skills, passion and experience refugee designers bring with them.

Quick Links

Beyond the Raging Sea Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/308576330/7421b6c8a9>

Jordan Fashion Week: <https://jordanfashionweekofficial.com/>

Abeer Al-Khraisha, ‘The Mother of Syrians’, was an excellent example of how community members can drive the “whole of society” approach to broaden the support base for refugees. Abeer shared her experiences of mobilizing her social network of family and friends to encourage their local community to support refugees by providing accommodation; donating clothes, food and furniture; and providing employment and training opportunities. Abeer’s generous community



work qualified her to become MENA recipient of UNHCR’s global Nansen Refugee Award in 2019; an award dedicated to those who go above and beyond the call of duty to protect refugees, displaced and stateless people. Through her community center work Abeer has worked to help refugees be more included in Jordanian society and seen the impact of art and culture in advancing this work. Abeer discussed the importance of recognizing host communities as spaces that can be conducive to the growth of art and culture as a means of healing and social cohesion.

“It is my duty as a human to protect these people, particularly the vulnerable ones, the single mothers, the children and the elderly; who have had to leave their homes behind, and often even their families”

– Abeer Al-Khraisha, UNHCR MENA Nansen Award Recipient 2019

SESSION III ENHANCING REFUGEE WELLBEING THROUGH ART AND CULTURE

This session addressed the impact of trauma on refugees and the therapeutic potential of art and culture to generate understanding, process emotions, and promote healing. Participants discussed the affective potential of art, music and literature to raise awareness and promote compassion for the impacts of conflict, the journey of seeking asylum and the realities of life in exile.

The power of theatre to promote wellbeing in crisis situations is exemplified by the work presented by Zoukak Theatre Company in Lebanon, which uses psychosocial theatre interventions of drama therapy and socially engaged theatre to meet the wellbeing needs of marginalized communities and people affected by conflict. For those in crises situations who engage in arts programs and theater there is no question as to the benefits for them individually and collectively. The benefits of such work beyond individual psychosocial wellbeing should not be underestimated; some of the most fundamental tensions and interactions in society have been explored through theatre, notions of justice are based on theatre dialectics, and political narratives started through art and drawing. This type of thinking and deep questioning is offered again through theatre in crisis situations where people removed from the daily comforts of life can reflect on their past, present and future in a unique way that allows for

Facilitator:

Ms. Zeina Jadaan (UNHCR Jordan)

Speakers:

Mr. Omar Abi Azar, Zoukak, Lebanon

Mr. Sinan Sweis, Jabal Amman Publishers, Jordan

Ms. Maysa Abu Lughod, Clinical Music Therapy at the National Music Conservatory, Jordan

Ms. Amna Fatani, Community Jameel, Saudi Arabia

the creation of alternative narratives. This is a powerful counter to political narratives that are so often disconnected from peoples' lived experiences.



In addition, Community Jameel presented some of the principles that guide their work in the arts to address displacement. These included mobilizing the therapeutic tools that art and culture provide, engaging in cultural preservation, promoting transcultural exchange through story telling and ensuring sustainability so communities are supported after projects have finished. A project in Azraq camp was described that was a co-creation between students and refugees to document some of the lost archeology and history through light

installations that to resembled Palmyra. In addition, the project 'TREE', Transforming Refugee Educational Experiences, was created to help teachers identify trauma in themselves and their students and use techniques such as theatre and performance to help overcome it.

The practice of music therapy was presented by the National Music Conservatory who now teach Clinical Music Therapy in Jordan. This is the only program in the Middle East that offers a bachelor's degree in the field to provide students with music and psychology knowledge that allows them to work with people who have experienced trauma or suffer from an illness. The University's own studies with refugees in Jordan demonstrated music therapy was able to help a significant number of people in managing stress and encouraging self-expression, reaching a broad diversity of people including children and people with motor disabilities. The therapy is clinical in the sense that a therapist is involved in the musical activities with the beneficiary where imagination, song, instrumental improvisation and words are mobilized to achieve therapeutic outcomes.

The 'Amal Trauma Project' of Jabal Amman Publishers was presented as an initiative that supports the needs of children who have experienced trauma through storytelling, a tradition with deep roots in the region's culture. Through a series of stories, songs and animations the project's writers and clinical physiologists address different stages of trauma in children. The animations and songs make the resource accessible for different ages while a hub of information provides tools and strategies for parents and teachers to support children. The hope is that these resources will be able to reach many children who without trauma-sensitive support will face drastic on-going challenges in their lives with implications for the whole society.

"Art echoes the voices of people, it allows them to reflect their inner feelings"

- Sinan Sweiss, Jabal Amman Publishers

Speakers discussed the gap in evidence to support the impact of art and cultural activities in addressing displacement which inhibits investment. Community Jameel as a philanthropic organization presented their role in supporting research and evidence to encourage greater investment. The challenge of

measuring impact of artistic projects for funding was discussed; funding bodies often measure impact on a final product however art and cultural projects that address wellbeing do so through the process itself. Further, it is extremely challenging to measure the impact of projects that aim to change societal perceptions. For projects that aim to impact social cohesion reporting is best focused on the process itself; where a group started and how they evolved to work together as an achievement. It was recommended that stakeholders define clearly what they mean by impact for art and cultural projects and clearly articulate the desired outcomes that are not product orientated. The discussion further highlighted the links between art and protection and the need to critically think about the ethics of commodifying refugee productions to ensure there is no exploitation.

Quick Links

Zoukak Theatre Company: <https://zoukak.org/b>

Community Jameel: <https://www.communityjameel.org/>

National Music Conservatory: <http://www.nmc.edu.jo/home-2/>

Jabal Amman Publishers: <https://www.japublishers.com/>

SESSION IV SHAPING NARRATIVES: ADVOCACY THROUGH ART

This session examined the ways in which artists can advocate for displaced persons and influence public opinion to foster inclusion and counter racism and xenophobia. This session highlighted the different shapes that such advocacy can take such as through journalism, community-based engagement or celebrity status. For example, Egyptian actress Rosaline El Bay described her experience of wearing a dress made by refugees from recycled plastic to highlight to plight of refugees which gained significant traditional and social media attention.

Facilitator:

Mr. Mohammed Abu Asaker (UNHCR MENA)

Speakers:

Ms. Patricia Khoder, L'Orient-Le Jour, Lebanon

Mr. Suheil Baqaen, Scent of Colours, Royal Academy for the Blind, Jordan

Ms. Rosaline El Bay, Actress, Egypt

Mr. Bassam Fallaha, Fashion Designer, Syria



Panelists discussed the important role that accurate reporting and advocacy plays in shaping public narratives and the need for such work to focus on refugees' talents and skills as opposed to their desperation. The challenges that the label refugee presents to social and economic inclusion was discussed whereby refugees struggle to separate themselves as creative and critical individuals from the stereotypical links to poverty, disease and war. Media representations of refugees as victims was highlighted as is a key

barrier to shifting the perception of refugees in host communities. Speakers discussed the issue of taking ownership of refugees' stories in ways that detract from their original meaning. It is critically important to give every opportunity to amplify the voices of refugees themselves.

Panelists discussed the skills and talents that refugees bring to host societies and described the sector's responsibility in discovering and enhancing these talents. The word talent should be used with caution in isolation given the connotations that only a select few are of value to host societies. The value of industry access for refugees was highlighted; refugees who have a wealth of knowledge and experience struggle to gain exposure, credibility and confidence in a new country. Once refugees are provided with industry access, they add enormous value to industries by bringing different experiences, skills and perspectives.



"I developed myself, and got a seat on the table to be able to speak on my own behalf, and reflect refugees' views"

– Bassam Fallaha, Fashion Designer

SESSION V COLLABORATIVE PLATFORMS TO PROMOTE REFUGEE TALENTS

Facilitator:

Ms. Shaden Khallaf (UNHCR MENA)

Speakers:

Mr. Wael Kodeih (Dabaka), Lebanon

Ms. Zeina Barhoum (Amman Opera Festival and Soprano), Jordan

This session addressed ways to collaboratively encourage and promote refugee talent, facilitate social cohesion and shift conceptions of refugees away from being a burden on host and third countries. The project 'Dabaka', was presented as a collaborative music project involving Syrian and Lebanese musicians.

The project, named after the music and dance tradition common to the region, drew on a shared history giving it a modern twist in a way that merged the two identities. The project was initiated in Lebanon in response to rising social tensions between the refugee and host



community at the start of the economic crisis. Involving professional musicians in the initiative aimed to open access for refugees to the broad spectrum of livelihood and skills building opportunities the industry has to offer.

“In light of globalization, I believe art and culture preserve refugees’ identity and values while exposing them to the ones in their host communities”

– Hicham Abkari, Casablanca Mohammed VI Theatre Director and General Secretary of Cultural and Creative Industries Federation, Morocco



Amman Opera Festival was presented as another platform that is being promoted as an opportunity for young talent among refugees and others to shine. Two Syrian refugee tailors

worked on costumes for a production alongside other aspiring talent from other communities; this was an effective way to bring different people together to collaboratively produce work. Participants were exposed to a range of new skills and opportunities through this platform and were introduced the history and culture of fashion in opera. As with the music industry it was noted that there are a vast range of vocational opportunities in this industry that relies on a broad spectrum of people and skills to create a production. Platforms such as this can therefore provide excellent opportunities for industry access as well as spaces to showcase the skills and talents of refugees.

The International Emerging Film Talent Association (IEFTA) discussed their work in promoting diversity in cinema and production-making and presented the upcoming documentary, ‘Telling the Real Story’, that depicts the dangerous journeys refugees take to counter misinformation from smugglers and traffickers. This work captures people’s testimonies of their journeys and depicts for audiences the realities at different stages of the journey to provide accurate information to people



at risk. In the discussion that followed participants explored the difference between art and testimony whereby art brings new paradigms and ideas about beauty and value, while testimony can offer a witness to atrocities and truth telling. The issue of storytelling was discussed in relation to positioning people in a

story in a way that recreates victimization. Moreover, speakers discussed the challenges of ethically making content about refugees' lives and representing their stories. It was emphasized that while actors in the art and culture industry may have unique abilities to communicate messages to audiences there is a need to use their skills in the best way to amplify the voices of refugees.

Quick Links

Listen to Dabaka: <https://soundcloud.com/user-211744676/sets/dabaka>

Telling the Real Story, IEFTA: <http://tellingtherealstory.org/>

Amman Opera Festival: <http://www.ammanoperafestival.com/>

SESSION VI

INSPIRATION STATION: INNOVATIVE CONTENT CREATION TO ADDRESS DISPLACEMENT

Facilitator:

Mr. Mohammed Abu Asaker
(UNHCR MENA)

Speakers:

Mr. Omar Hussain: Social Media
Activist, Saudi Arabia
Mr. Chaker Khazaal, Author,
Palestine
Mr. Mohamed Hawary, UNHCR Jordan

This final session focused on innovative ways to communicate messages and increase engagement in issues of displacement through a variety of means such as social media, novels, journalism and online videos. Speakers discussed the drivers of xenophobia as well as positive ways to help people connect with refugees who can be the targets of such hate. When innovative content is created in an attempt to shape the narrative about refugees it is working against an overwhelming dominant narrative advanced by governments that vilifies refugees and migration in general. Countering the volume of this narrative is extremely challenging. It was recommended

that a range of social media platforms and influencers that target different audiences with tailored communication is an effective way to broaden the scope of a campaigns impact. Communicating positive messages and finding common points of humanity are powerful to counter misinformation about the burden of refugees and the political narratives that dehumanize refugees.



The tendency to create sad content on social media platforms is ineffective and contributes to empathy fatigue which in the context of protracted crises is a significant challenge to fundraising. In this environment there is a need for new ideas to catch people's attention and create a bridge between the person telling the story and the listener. There is an opportunity to tap into regional

commonality and pride to counter intergroup racism. In addition, there is power in normalizing refugees represented in mainstream media to counter dehumanizing narratives and remind people of their shared aspirations. When there are similarities between the subject and the target audience messages are more

likely to get through. The general public no longer need to hear that the situation for refugees is bad; they need to know how similar they are to the people impacted. Speakers discussed ways they bring the human element to what being a refugee is that is that is more powerful than numbers.

“It is important to look beyond our differences, so we don’t lose sight of our commonalities, our humanity; we all fall in love, we all get sad, we all have a grandmother, we all get sick, this is what makes us human.”

– Chaker Khazaal, Author and Social Media Influencer

THEMATIC OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following section highlights key outcomes and recommendations that arose throughout the roundtable and the breakout discussion groups according to the three broad thematic focuses of the event: enhancing refugee and host community well-being through art and culture; shaping narratives: advocacy through art; and collaboration platforms for refugee talent.

1. Enhancing Refugee and Host Community Well-Being through Art and Culture

- Projects should be designed to ensure sustainability, so communities are supported in the longer-term or are positively impacted even after projects are finished.
- Artists and culture practitioners seeking to enhance wellbeing and social cohesion should employ rigorous methods of monitoring and evaluation; the focus of evaluation should be on the process of the initiative. Projects should articulate a clear metric for success with respect to the anticipated change as a result of their interventions.
- The impact of artistic projects on healing should be measured on observable behaviors. There is a need to broaden the scope of understanding these behaviors in the sector in order to rigorously evaluate them.
- UNHCR should advocate among funding stakeholders that wellbeing and social cohesion projects measure impact through the process and encourage a shift away from product-oriented outcomes.
- Thought needs to be given to consider an ethical framework and principled guidelines for engaging with communities in such work. Collaborative platforms such as this can assist in cross-sectoral sharing of practices to facilitate this.
- Artists and culture practitioners need to develop clear strategies for responding to issues such as crime, drug abuse and sexual exploitation that impact the wellbeing of refugees and host communities. Artists and culture practitioners are uniquely able to confront such issues through their work that encourages non-judgmental expression.
- Artists and culture practitioners should ensure that efforts to enhance the wellbeing of refugee and host communities are inclusive of social and ethnic groups so as not to reproduce divisions.

2. Shaping Narratives: Advocacy through Art

- Work that highlights common interests, shared values and mutual goals amongst refugees and host communities can counter divisive narratives and humanize politicized communities.

- Participants discussed focusing future work and content creation on where the sector can make the most impact in shaping the narrative on refugees. Entertainment-based content has the ability to reach and engage the largest proportion of the public who may be sympathetic to refugees and are also exposed to dominant political narratives.
- Participants proposed a platform through which such projects can be presented that are focused on displacement issues, are entertaining and aim to change the mind-sets of people. Projects that create this content would need to be sustainable and have an element of longevity to be viable.
- Artists and culture practitioners should aim to collaborate with refugees in the production of their work to recognize the wealth of talent that exists within refugee communities. In addition, collaborative work that engages both refugee and host communities opens space for dialogue and mutual understanding.
- Initiatives that arise out of the development of this roundtable and sectoral platform should continue to collaborate and engage with UNHCR to ensure projects are informed, well publicized and supported.
- The sectoral network established from the roundtable should be the basis of on-going meetings, both nationally and regionally to advance collaboration and synergy; UNHCR should help facilitate this. There should also be greater refugee representation at these meetings to meaningfully include their perspectives and input in future work that arises.
- MENA CSND should advocate for the inclusion of refugee issues with Ministers of Culture to promote tolerance and acceptance in their programs and plans of action.
- A range of social media platforms and influencers that target different audiences with tailored communication is an effective way to broaden the scope of a campaigns impact.
- Communicating positive messages and finding common points of humanity are powerful to counter misinformation about the burden of refugees and the political narratives that dehumanize refugees.

3. Collaboration Platforms for Refugee Talent

- It was recommended that advocacy on this theme should avoid heavy reliance on the term ‘talent’ given the connotation that host societies are only interested in those with talent; instead platforms should emphasize the talents, skills, passions and ideas of refugees that add value to societies.
- Participants proposed a model for identifying and motivating refugee potential, talent and skills in the region. Three primary objectives were identified to underpin this model: maintaining social stability, developing an environment that supports refugees to thrive both socially and economically, and creating layers of networking to enable refugees to find opportunities for creativity as well as people to collaborate with. Three broad categories of people would play different roles in the functioning of this model: those with potential, those already actively creating, and those exceptional success stories who break barriers, shift broader attitudes and inspire others.
- It was recommended that work needs to be done in scouting for those refugees with potential. This should be pursued through institutes that look for specific skill sets. Greater advocacy both from the art and culture sector and humanitarian stakeholders should be done to increase the number of scholarships offered for refugees at such institutes.

- It was recommended that for those refugees who are already producing art the main obstacle remains in ensuring they have access to intellectual property and are able to perform formally and legally. Permit systems differ from one country to another however good models such as exist in Morocco and should be advocated for. In addition, support should be provided to people in this category to develop their local networks.
- It was recommended that each country identify three categories to focus on (i.e. music, fashion or theatre). Selection of these categories should be based on the extent to which they can maintain social stability and decrease social tension; their income generating potential; and the level of capacity and resources locally to link people into a network.



WAY FORWARD

This report reflects some of the highlights from the 'MENA Roundtable on the Role of Art and Culture in Addressing Displacement', which was held in December 2019, Amman, Jordan in the lead up to the first Global Refugee Forum. The roundtable was the first of its kind in the region and aimed to discuss how artists and cultural actors can shape public narratives and expand the space for constructive dialogues, particularly in relation to social cohesion between refugees and host communities. The roundtable provided a platform for over 50 artists and cultural actors to frame their role in issues related to displacement in MENA and share successful practices of promoting refugee inclusion. Participants expressed a desire to build on the momentum of the roundtable into 2020, consolidating themselves as a regional sector-based network committed to addressing issues of displacement. UNHCR aims to harness the enthusiasm demonstrated at the roundtable and facilitate further collaboration and synergy.

The roundtable discussions led to the following overarching outcomes:

- A common understanding of global trends and the regional situation on refugee and displacement issues;
- Analysis of the role of artists and cultural actors in the implementation of the GCR and CRRF and the advancement of humanitarian outcomes for refugees;
- Shared practices of how artists and cultural actors currently engage in responding to refugee crises in the region;
- A deeper understanding the connection between art and protection needs among refugees;
- Analysis of the impact of innovative collaborations and a more inclusive approach toward partnerships;
- A common understanding around the role of art and culture in shaping discourses around displacement and the potential for the sector to play a greater role in countering negative stereotypes that inhibit social inclusion;
- Analysis of the role and practice of art and culture as a medium of expression and healing for refugees;
- Shared strategies for identifying and promoting refugees as talented contributors to host communities; and
- The creation of a platform that can be used to build and develop connections and collaborations between those in the art and culture sector committed to addressing issues of displacement.

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