
SUMMARY NOTE-MEDITERRANEAN MUNICIPALITIES AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS: PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING WORKSHOP FOR COMMUNITIES HOSTING REFUGEES

The Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), the World Bank Group and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in partnership with the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the United Cities and Local Governments Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MEWA), the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), and MedCities, jointly organized the “**Mediterranean Municipalities at the Forefront of the Refugee Crisis: Peer-to-Peer Learning Workshop for Communities Hosting Refugees**” event that took place on **May 30- June 1st in Amman, Jordan.**

The event brought together about **140 participants, including 70 municipal** representatives from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Turkey and Europe, central government, civil society as well as development and humanitarian institutions, with the objective of fostering cross-country and cross-regional exchanges and learning between communities on best practices and innovative solutions to attain the common welfare of refugees and host communities.

The event made use of several communication methodologies to maximize peer-to peer learning, such as **working groups, networking breaks, exhibition space** for best practice sharing and a **field visit.**

Summary of main messages: (Discussions, Working Groups, Evaluation forms)

The peer-to-peer learning event illustrated that the challenges faced by local governments and municipalities that host large number of refugees, are very similar. **Municipalities in Syria’s neighboring countries are at the forefront of the refugee crisis.** Most municipalities felt they lacked human and other resources, technical, planning and management skills as well as funds to effectively cope with the refugee’s crisis. They **call for more support as well as increased cooperation** with central government, international organizations and NGOs to address the multiple challenges presented by the refugee crisis and develop an integrated response.

Vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation between the multiple actors that are involved in refugee response was seen as vital by all participants of the peer-to peer learning event, but challenges remain across all countries. At the same time many valuable lessons have been learnt and communication and coordination mechanisms are being developed and successfully tested on all levels and sectors. Building on channels and communication structures that existed rather than reinventing the wheel proved most efficient.

There is an **urgent need to further identify best practices and working solutions** in all areas of municipal services provision: in waste management, water provision, housing, strategic planning, social & community services, and to a certain extent health, education and higher education and employment. In addition, social cohesion in the hosting communities and psycho-social support are key areas of concern that have to be addressed strategically. The peer-to-learning event proved to be a treasure trove of coping mechanisms that need to be systematically documented and shared.

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN MESSAGES OF THE EVENT

- **RESPONSE CAPACITY:** The refugee influx impacted the public service delivery significantly, most importantly waste management, housing and services to refugees. Most of these sectors are the responsibility of the municipalities, and need direct support. The majority of municipalities confirmed that they were not well prepared to respond to this refugee crisis in terms of technical skills, human resources and financial needs.
- **RESILIENCE:** Municipalities have demonstrated extraordinary resilience to the refugee crisis. Developing resilience approaches and strategies to the crisis was discussed as a useful approach to strengthen the preparedness, response and recovery capacities of municipalities and citizens to face future shocks and crisis in a longer term framework.
- **IMPROVED COORDINATION:** Strengthened coordination between local and national authorities is vital, especially on selected sectors such as employment, livelihood, health and education, and to improve institutional and financial arrangements for a local response to the crisis. Local authorities collaborate with NGOs on a regular basis to provide better services. Ineffective coordination remains however an area of concern. Local authorities called for a concrete improvement of coordination and transparency for the sustainable improvement of municipal services to host populations and refugees.
- **HOST COMMUNITY AND REFUGEES INVOLVEMENT** in policy design and implementation processes is key to increase knowledge on the needs and resources of the population, insure sustainability of actions, and increase social cohesion. The PRIVATE SECTOR is an important stakeholder for the development of long term solutions, including housing, employment and local economic development. It needs to be supported and encouraged by national and local authorities to better enable employment generation and investments in infrastructure.
- **ENSURING SOCIAL COHESION** is also a key priority for coexistence and stability within host municipalities, which can be reached through selected actions involving refugees and host communities together, as experience has shown.
- **BETTER CITY DATA:** Municipalities are in general well aware of the scope and number of displaced population in their area. But the discussions highlighted a need for collecting and assembling specific data and analysis on the municipal reality of the refugee population (population characteristics, skill/education profile, existing infrastructures, land and buildings, etc.) in a more systematic manner, in order to better inform policies and actions.
- **MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP:** Hosting communities are at the forefront of the refugee crisis and offer their hospitality and services to the new refugee population. They are providing an outstanding global good by hosting refugees. Municipalities assumed this responsibility. Continued leadership is crucial to ensure and strengthen effective service delivery.

2. AREAS FOR SUPPORT AND FOLLOW UP

- 97% of participating municipalities confirmed the need for additional support in the short- and medium term. Technical/financial/knowledge support should be directly provided to municipalities. Areas include: better municipal services provision in priority sectors (Solid Waste managt/Water management/Services to refugees); Capacity-building for municipal staff in crisis management; and planning skills.
- **PARTNERSHIPS and INCLUSION:** Build strong partnerships; “connect cities”. Municipalities confirmed their interest for city-to-city learning, and connection between cities. Participants

requested to involve more Syrian refugees, European municipalities, and smaller municipalities in further exchanges. They confirmed interest in pursuing the P2P exchange.

Proposed next steps: Peer-to-Peer (P2P) learning through the “Host Communities Learning Network”

- **Set up of a P2P Learning Network**(Arabic/English) along with needed knowledge-sharing instruments (online/offline) by September.
- **Targeted P2P small scale workshops in priority sectors for municipal practitioners**(2016-17): Hands-on and practical workshops geared towards identifying and adapting workable models for hosting municipalities. These workshops can be supported by other municipal practitioners beyond MENA, CSOs and international organizations that can provide expertise and best practice models.
- **Peer exchanges in host countries and technical field visits**(2016-17): preferably hosted by local municipalities on site for municipal practitioners in key sectors. The peer-to peer workshops should be accompanied by technical field visits prior and after the workshop to allow for case by case assessment and support.
- **Preparation of Best Practice Notes and lessons learned**(2016-17): Compile best practices that have been shared during the peer-to-peer learning workshop for each of the key sectors. Work with the respective implementing partner to clearly assess the components of the best practice approach, its prerequisites (success criteria) and positive short-term and long-term impact. Share the resulting compendium of best practice cases with all concerned stakeholders.
- **Annual P2P Workshop in host countries bringing working groups together**(May/June 2017); similarly to the event in Amman, that allows cross-sectoral sharing of experience and report back on progress and lessons learnt from the national P2P meetings. The annual workshop should result in a publication that is shared online and compiles the most successful sectoral best practices and references to their implementing partners.

A partner coordination meeting to agree on next steps will be convened by mid-July.

3. SUMMARY OF THEMATIC SESSIONS

- The summary of the findings and recommendations was composed using the notes from the main thematic breakout sessions, each with three sub-topics:
 1. Intergovernmental frameworks and institutions of coordination and cooperation to improve local resilience to the refugee crisis
 2. Service Delivery and Preparedness of Local Governments, including in collaboration with non-governmental actors
 3. Local Economic Development and Labor Market Inclusion
 4. Building and strengthening Social Cohesion between Refugees and Host Communities.

THEME 1: Intergovernmental frameworks and institutions of cooperation to improve local resilience to the refugee crisis

Lessons learnt

- Developing city strategies including the resilience approach allows for better preparedness to shocks such as abrupt inupts of new inhabitants; facilitates project design and ownership by the municipality; creates consensus among different parties, raises awareness and creates a pathways for the direct involmnet of international donors, civil society and all political representatives.
- Central and municipal coordination is essential in providing a holistic and integrated response to the challenge of hosting refugees. It allows for the more efficient and targeted distribution of resources, as well as the sharing of experiences and expertise between different levels of government. For example, including local authorities in migration management policies (best practice in Turkey where unions of municipalities where included in the national migration management plan) improves the resilience capacities of cities.
- The limited mandate of municipalities is a common obstacle to integrated resilience policies: decentralisation or heightened municipal responsibilities may increase the competences and capacities of the municipalities to politically decide and allocate their own resources.
- Developing municipal investment programs that generate revenues is a way to increase municipal capacities.

Recommendations

- Develop planningcapacity of local authorities including through staff training and the development of municipal databases to improve city data.
- Create one-stop integration points for refugees with adequate resources and trained staff (with intercultural competences) in order to allow for the early intervention and activation of refugees (best practice in Germany)
- Support the development of municipal infrastructure in light of the abrupt increase of population and capitalize on opportunities to develop revenue generating services
- Better coordinate and target donors support to local governments affected by the influx of Syrian refugees, with avoiding duplication of studies and programs; International donors and development agencies to include local authorities in response plans.
- Ensure that refugee distribution is based on municipal absorption to deliver services
- Replicate the proposed solutions, and resilience approach with Syrian municipalities

THEME 2: Service Delivery and Preparedness of Local Governments, including in collaboration with non-governmental actors

Lessons learnt

- Since the beginning of the crisis, less than 1% of the funding raised by the international community has been allocated to projects that include local authorities. This puts a threat on local governance and finally on stability of the region.
- Municipalities are key to address need of refugees and vulnerable populations in service delivery:

- Information collectors: Municipalities are instrumental to provide ground information for central authorities, NGOs and international organizations
- Resource providers : lands and buildings owned by the municipality
- Regulation facilitator: they can play a role in accelerating the process of construction permits, decrease of registration fees, legislation on waste.
- Honest broker agents: can facilitate the relations and agreements between all parties in a project (Donors, NGOs, private sector agents, beneficiaries)
- Strategic planners & Project managers.

Recommendations

- Develop ownership and leadership of municipalities prior to funding
- Strengthen project management capacities of municipalities
- Adopt an inclusive approach with all parties involved, with better transparency to enhance trust among all stakeholders to attain sustainable and efficient response plan
- Commitments from NGOs to coordinate their efforts in working with local authorities
- Support decentralized systems for certain services such as solid waste management or housing development
- Encourage market-based mechanisms to involve all parties, especially the private sector, and develop social responsibility principles: such as housing development by the private sector, or the “polluter pays” principle for waste management
- Develop peer-to-peer exchanges between countries and cities.

THEME 3: Developing shared growth in areas affected by the refugee crisis: from national to local actions

Lessons learnt

- Creating decent employment opportunities for refugees can encourage a shift from the informal to the formal sector. This can lead to mutual employment opportunities between host and refugee communities as well as new and increased investment possibilities.
- A valuable strategy for job creation consists in enhancing and utilizing Economic Developmental Zones for supporting different development tasks such as employment support and enhancing investment, providing jobs and revenue for local and refugee populations alike.
- Drafting local development and economic strategies for governorates and municipalities such as Mafraq or Irbid holds real potential for the scaling-up of municipal capacity.
- In host countries, the potential and importance of the private sector is often not recognized, neither by youth (who aspire to be employed in public sectors), neither by policy makers.
- It is essential to establish a common working culture to foster better opportunities for mutual employment between refugees and host populations. There is a need to identify the skills and qualifications of refugees to match them to the expectations of employers.
- Syrian investors in the diaspora can be encouraged to invest in host communities to generate employment and economic activity for locals and refugees.
- Scaling-up agricultural production and skills amongst refugees and vulnerable populations in host communities can contribute to rural and urban resilience alike. Increasing local food security with low-energy/water input agricultural production is an important step towards

increasing environmental and socio-economic resilience, particularly in the MENA where water scarcity, desertification and volatile food prices threaten socio-environ. stability.

- Agriculture can contribute to social cohesion by turning refugees into a non-competitive, productive force instead of a burden. Refugee-inclusive agricultural production plots can increase local food security and boost the local economy while driving food prices down and remaining non-competitive for local populations.

Recommendations

- Host communities can enhance the capacities and skills of job seekers (including local and refugees) by creating professional training centers involving multiple stakeholders (municipal bodies, private and educational sectors). This can lead to enhanced employment opportunities, notably in priority municipal services such as solid waste management.
- At the legal level, it is essential to facilitate the process of obtaining work permits for refugees while offering continuous guidance through the legal process to access formal employment in host communities. A national framework is therefore necessary, comprising policies for the private sector to involve it in national development
- Municipalities can encourage the mutual transfer of skills between locals and refugees, while encouraging youth to acquire vocational skills, soft skills, an entrepreneurial mindset (backed by English and computer skills, volunteering, etc.). Municipalities can also strive to match youth job demands with employers' demands (through job fairs, job database such as in Sultanbeyli, Turkey, etc.). Training refugees in this manner, specifically youth, is essential to the process of refugee return and reconstruction.
- It is important to use the skills of Syrian refugees, by perceiving refugees not only as service recipients but as service providers (this is instrumental in the refugee camps, for instance).
- Food security is an essential component of regional security. Municipalities should therefore reflect on how they can increase their local food security and resilience (notably in terms of water) to be able to absorb incoming external shocks more effectively.
- Agricultural produce can create extensive chains of value for refugees and host communities alike. It provides a wealth of transferrable skills that can be learned by refugees during their time in exile, and then put to good use upon their return. Production and income occur after a single season, and can thereby fast-track the recovery process for returning refugees.

THEME 4: Building and strengthening social cohesion between refugees and host communities

Lessons learnt:

- Acknowledge that cultural differences, misconceptions and tensions exist and focus on how to overcome them. Recognition is an important factor that has to be considered in order to build common feelings of membership, trust and unity. This leads to cohesion amongst individuals and also amongst different social groups.
- Improve basic services, and use existing service delivery structures that can be supported by NGOs and international agencies, rather than creating parallel structures. (Health plays a crucial role, but also building economic opportunities)
- Include both host communities and Syrians in decision-making and create space for participation.

- Focus not only on the “hardware” (creation of jobs, restoration of infrastructure, etc...), but also on the “software”, for example creating and promoting tolerance, respect and dignity to foster social cohesion.
- Considering the potentials of refugees can help in new contexts to come up with appropriate projects and approaches. Recognize the advantages of these co-existences and be innovative.
- Personal relationships at a local level: relationships with municipal authorities have to be built in order to meet the needs of the community, to implement best practices and to connect with the local communities. The coordination system should adapt to the local authority. There should be an integrated coordination mechanism.

Recommendations:

- At the onset of a forced displacement crisis, social cohesion programming will need to be part of the crisis response planning.
- Relationship between social cohesion and services: limited mandate of municipalities which underscores need coordination. There needs to be more understanding on municipalities' mandate in order for NGOs and donors to plan their coordination accordingly.
- Local coordination is key: Municipalities will need to communicate and coordinate better with the NGOs. Coordination is not only the responsibility of NGOs, Municipalities should reach out to NGOs operating in their area advising them how can they better work in order improve social cohesion.
- Bring together the demand of municipalities, the professional expertise of NGOS / INGOS, and international agencies that can provide funding for interventions and programs.
- Multiple actor involvement and the creation of partnerships to avoid a growing policy of segregation. E.g. in the health sector including both vulnerable host communities and refugees in their programs
- Importance of understanding the root causes of social tensions and addressing social stressors at its core: this topic should be addressed in a comprehensive way. The media has the ability to damage perceptions – we should look further.
- Building formal and informal social networks: In order to strengthen participation in formal and informal social networks we have to build up engagements with political actors.
- Support mechanisms must be enhanced: Growing gaps and costs resulting from inadequate support to national and local delivery systems must be addressed (health, education, and municipal services).
- National and regional differences: We have to keep these differences in mind when it comes to deciding about specific strategies and approaches.
- Long-term solutions have to be found: It is crucial to have a good monitoring system which provides regular information on the proposals.