



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



**CONCEPT
NOTE
“CITIES OF
SOLIDARITY
IN THE
AMERICAS”**

SEPTEMBER 2022

COVER PHOTO:

A Colombian refugee with disability at a municipal market in Esmeraldas, Ecuador.

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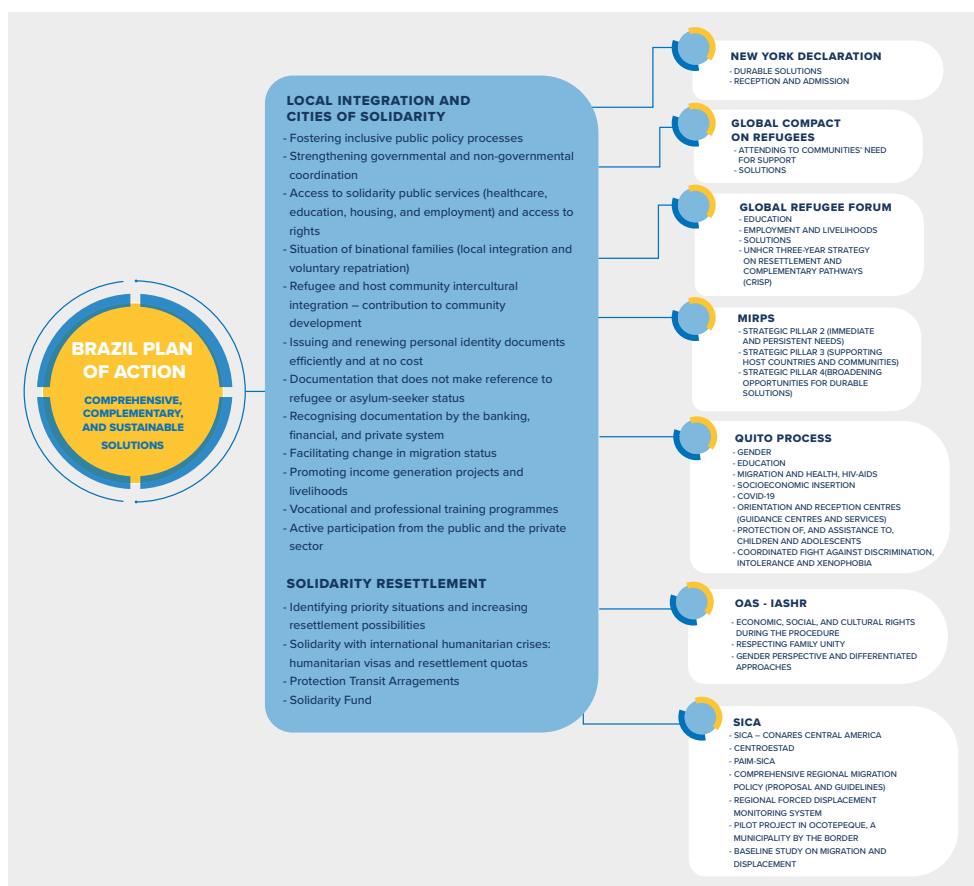
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Background

In the Americas, most refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people live or move in urban or peri-urban areas looking for safety, but also livelihoods and job opportunities, access to education and health and better living conditions in general. In this context, **local authorities play a leading role** in promoting reception, protection and local integration. Local authorities' effective commitment is essential to strengthen access to rights and services in their territory; they are in the position to generate quick changes in local policies, which can positively and immediately affect the lives of the people UNHCR serves. Nonetheless, challenges to achieve integration are considerable at the local level, above all for small municipalities and peripheral cities due to limited human and

financial resources or little support and coordination from the central government.

The “Cities of Solidarity” initiative stems from the recommendations identified by States in the region under the *2004 Mexico Plan of Action*¹ and the *2014 Brazil Plan of Action*², aimed at recognizing local governments' efforts to provide protection and integration. The plan emphasizes that more concerted efforts are required to ensure that the necessary protection and social response systems are implemented, which must include multiple actions: facilitating access to public services, promoting labour insertion, enhancing social, cultural and technological opportunities in order to maintain social cohesion among all inhabitants.



¹ Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America. Mexico City, 16 November 2004. Chapter 3, Paragraph 1

² Brazil Plan of Action – Brasilia, 3 December 2014. Chapter 3, “Local Integration” Programme

In 2009, UNHCR promulgated the policy on the *Protection and Solutions of Refugees in Urban Areas*³, which proposes to ensure that cities are recognized as legitimate places where refugees are considered as holders of rights and maximize the protection space available to both refugees and the humanitarian organizations that support them. The importance of inclusive planning for rapid global urbanisation, considering the increasingly urban nature of the refugee and displaced population (by the end of 2016, some 60 per cent of refugees were living in urban areas)⁴, came at the forefront of the global institutional policy agenda. This is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal 11, which aims to achieve inclusive cities and communities by 2030. The New York Declaration Annex 1 of 2016 states that a comprehensive refugee response should involve multiple partners, including local governments. The 2018 *Global Compact on Refugees* highlights the pivotal role that networks of cities and municipalities can play for refugees' inclusion into urban systems by sharing good practices on the provision of inclusive public services and innovative approaches to responses in urban settings, with the support of UNHCR. Moreover, the World Humanitarian

Summit, held in May 2016, established the Global Alliance for Urban Crises⁵ (GAUC) during a Special Session, building on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) 'Strategy for Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas', and the decision of the IASC Principals in April 2015 to adopt area-based approaches and surge capacity through local authorities. Similarly, the Habitat III Conference, held in Quito in October 2016, reaffirmed global commitments to better understand activities in urban contexts when launching the New Urban Agenda (NUA). The NUA is a guiding document that collects commitments of the States towards "ensuring full respect for the human rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, regardless of their migration status, and supporting their host cities in the spirit of international cooperation"⁶. In the NUA, States also recognized the significant social, economic, and cultural contributions that refugees and migrants can bring to urban life⁷. The 10th World Urban Forum in 2020 acknowledged that "In urban crisis situations specifically, the inclusion of migrants, IDPs and refugees into response and recovery strategies is crucial for increasing social cohesion, reducing inequalities and promoting human rights."

³ <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/hcdialogue%20/4ab356ab6/unhcr-policy-refugee-protection-solutions-urban-areas.html>

⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016*, 20 June 2017

⁵ <http://urbancrises.org/>

⁶ United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III), *New Urban Agenda*, 20 October 2016, p. 11 (para 28)

⁷ *Idem*.

Goals and Objectives

The initiative's overarching objective is to **strengthen protection and integration efforts of local authorities** through a process of institutional capacity strengthening and inspire other authorities to develop inclusive public policies for people UNHCR serves in the Americas. The Cities of Solidarity initiative was devised to develop sustainable strategies for reception in conditions of dignity and comprehensive local integration of refugees and migrants in host communities. The initiative is geared towards local authorities, namely entities officially responsible for all the public services and facilities in a particular area, below the national or federal state level. Local authorities can be, but not limited to, cities, towns, municipalities, boroughs, cantons, provinces, regions, departments. Organizations and associations representing local authorities are also welcomed to join the initiative.

In line with global developments, UNHCR recognizes the efforts made by local authorities to put in place municipal public policies to **foster protection and integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants,**

IDPs, stateless and beneficiaries of other forms of humanitarian protection, allowing them to live in a dignified manner. In the broadest sense, protection provided should include the enjoyment of economic, socio-cultural, civil-political, and legal rights, non-discrimination, and respect for other obligations towards refugees, in particular those provided for in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The proactive role of **local authorities** in ensuring respect for rights is complemented by the essential role played by a wide range of other actors including: the **authorities at regional and national level** (including line ministries), **civil society – including people UNHCR serves and host communities –**, the **private sector, academia, media**, as well as the **international community**. This multi-stakeholder approach aims to generate strategies that will allow local authorities to better address the needs of the general population, including displaced persons, using comprehensive approaches, and taking advantage of the capabilities of this population to contribute to social and economic development.

Implementation

Building on existing experiences in the Americas, UNHCR wishes to consolidate, strengthen, and expand the existing initiative taken by cities in the region. The initiative is mostly implemented through **agreements** between UNHCR and the local authorities

under the Cities of Solidarity initiative. Agreements are usually ratified by the municipal/province/regional councils and become public policies that remain in force through any changes in public administration.

The agreements may provide for the development of specific projects regarding any of the areas of the cooperation established in it or the creation of technical committees made up of representatives of both institutions and any other institution joining it as a space to exchange information and analysis and/or define, implement, and monitor a work plan.

The initiative aims to support and build capacity in local authorities in different **strategic areas**, among them (but not limited to): facilitating access to education, healthcare, social assistance, and other local services, promoting livelihoods and socio-

economic inclusion, identifying persons with specific needs, ensuring access to adequate housing, minimizing risks for evictions while promoting security of tenure, particularly in informal settlements where most of the population cohabit.

Cities of Solidarity implementation will be based on the provisions made in the Global Compact on Refugees concerning more **inclusive planning**, while “responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist. Relevant actors will, wherever possible, continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host community members to assist in designing appropriate, accessible and inclusive responses.” The initiative will also prioritize **area-based approaches** so that host communities and refugees can collectively participate to the shaping of the territory they live in.

As the Global Compact on Refugees notes, the creation of **networks** of local authorities can play a pivotal role in generating an environment more favorable to local integration by sharing good practices on access to rights, and on the provision of inclusive public services and innovative approaches to responses in urban settings, with the support of UNHCR. Cities can commit to network with other cities of solidarity and other city networks, by

collecting and sharing experiences such as best practices, data, lessons learnt and challenges. Furthermore, a city can also actively promote (or **champion**) the concept nationally and internationally in any relevant forum it takes part in and with any other city it is directly collaborating or in contact with (i.e., through twinning with other cities).

UNHCR has a two-fold role to play, through its *Country Offices* who will disseminate information and promote the initiative nationwide and follow-up with the local authorities that have a) been identified or have voluntarily presented themselves as candidates to become a City of Solidarity; b) signed a “Cities of Solidarity” agreement in order to ensure its full implementation. The *Regional Bureau of the Americas*, in coordination with country offices and with the involvement of local authorities will ensure that the initiative is promoted at (sub-)regional and global levels so to gather attention and possibly support from the international community. As an overarching goal the initiative aims to encourage cities and local authorities to **pledge support at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum**.

Cities of Solidarity and the MIRPS

The Regional Integrated Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS) is the regional contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees for Central America and Mexico and aims to strengthen regional cooperation and responsibility sharing associated with countries of origin, transit, and destination. In 2020, the MIRPS states identified strengthening the response and capacity of local authorities as a cross-cutting regional priority. In this context, UNDP and UNHCR have jointly developed the **Regional Local Governance Framework**⁸ seeking to provide a tool to

implement the Cities of Solidarity initiative that reflects regional prioritization, in line with the commitment to invest in and promote the role of local authorities in advancing protection and solutions. The framework is built around four pillars and will **serve as a support tool for generating commitments with local authorities** on (i) mainstreaming forced displacement into local development planning; (ii) protection and access to essential services; (iii) rule of law and e-governance; and (iv) socio-economic integration and social cohesion.

Cities of Solidarity in Guatemala

In 2021, the **First National Conference of Cities of Solidarity** was held in Guatemala within the framework of the IV Annual Regional Meeting of the MIRPS, chaired by the Government of Guatemala as Pro Tempore Presidency (PPT) of the MIRPS. It was

held in the city of La Antigua, organized by the PPT in coordination with the National Association of Municipal Mayors - ANAM - and included the participation of the High Commissioner for Refugees, representatives of the refugee community, local

⁸ UNHCR-UNDP Regional Local Governance Framework: <https://www.acnur.org/61737c4f4>

authorities of cities participating in the initiative, central government officials, officials from different MIRPS countries and representatives of civil society organizations. During the event, good practices, lessons learned, challenges and innovative solutions were shared on protection mechanisms and socioeconomic inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, people with

international protection needs and returnees with protection needs. Likewise, this exchange space allowed the municipalities that are part of the initiative to publicize the progress and inclusive practices implemented that have facilitated the coexistence and integration of refugees with the population of the host communities.

Cities of Solidarity in the Southern Cone

In 2019, in Buenos Aires, representatives of the local governments of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay met to share good practices and information to respond in an innovative way to the inclusion of refugees' needs in urban environments. On this occasion, the local authorities committed to promote socio-economic inclusion and expand the network of Cities of Solidarity.

In 2020, **National Meetings of Cities of Solidarity** were held in Argentina and Uruguay with the participation of 19 and 5 local governments respectively, under the theme: "Shared responsibility: towards a new solidarity pact for access to economic, social and cultural rights of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and other persons in need of international protection, in urban contexts". As a result, it was agreed to establish **Networks of Solidarity Cities** with the active involvement of community-based refugees

and migrants associations in order to develop sustainable strategies for a reception in conditions of dignity and full local integration in host communities, promoting effective and comprehensive access to their economic, social, and cultural rights.

In Chile, during 2020 and 2021 a series of trainings, talks, and meetings were held with municipal officials' part of the initiative in order to address the main challenges for the local integration of people UNHCR serves in the context of the COVID 19 crisis, such as education, health, and housing. Also, in 2021, 12 municipalities participated in a national consultation on challenges and strengths for the economic integration of refugees and migrants in their territories. In this space, good practices and lessons learnt were shared, and network among the local governments belonging to the initiative was strengthened.

Cities of Solidarity in Brazil

In Brazil, the implementation of the Cities of Solidarity initiative is based on the elaboration of annual reports that identify and recognize good practices of local governments in the protection and integration of refugees and migrants, rather than on agreements between UNHCR and the local authorities. This methodology takes into consideration the continental dimension of the country, with its over 5000 municipalities, and the widespread presence of refugees and migrants in all of its five regions. Currently, more than 700 municipalities have refugees and migrants among its populations, so a broad range of local governments are playing an active and innovative role in developing local

responses as protocols, plans and policies, as well as structuring local Councils and Committees for refugees and migrants. Therefore, the initiative in Brazil aims to recognize the efforts put in place by local authorities and support the strengthening of tools for the elaboration and implementation of public strategies for the integration and protection of refugees and migrants. The Cities of Solidarity Brazil Report – Protection and Integration of Refugees at the Local Level – is presented annually. The report recognizes good public practices of municipalities in five thematic areas: Education, Protection Capacity, Responsibility Sharing, Local Integration and Shelter.

Coordination with other actors

Cities of Solidarity, as part of a comprehensive refugee response supports a multi-stakeholder approach. In this sense, the initiative welcomes the involvement and **support of other actors committed** to the strengthening of protection and integration efforts of local authorities, such as international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, regional coordination and partnership

mechanisms, civil society partners, academia, the private sector, media and refugees' organizations. Being the initiative's concept based on flexibility and adaptation any organization sharing the same values and interested in achieving results aligned with this initiative is welcome to contribute not only to its implementation but also to its shaping and steering its further development.

Connected Tools

The tools presented below have the potential to support the implementation of the initiative in different ways, such as enhancing visibility,

deepening analysis, and facilitating the sharing of information and good practices. None of them is meant to be mandatory.

Cities #WithRefugees Campaign – Showing Solidarity

UNHCR's [Cities #WithRefugees](#) campaign invites cities and local authorities all over the world who are working to promote inclusion, support refugees and bring communities together to sign a **statement of solidarity #WithRefugees**. The Cities of Solidarity initiative strongly encourages the signing of the solidarity statement and its sharing on social media as to deepen engagement with local authorities so they can increase awareness and support for refugees. Global [communication](#) material continue to

be produced to help acknowledge the support of cities.

UNHCR recently also launched a [Cities good practices and innovative approaches digital platform](#) in 2021. The platform includes over 100 good practices and innovative approaches submitted by cities worldwide. UNHCR welcomes cities to continue to submit good practices to this platform.

Effective Inclusion of Refugees: A Participatory Approach for practitioners at local level

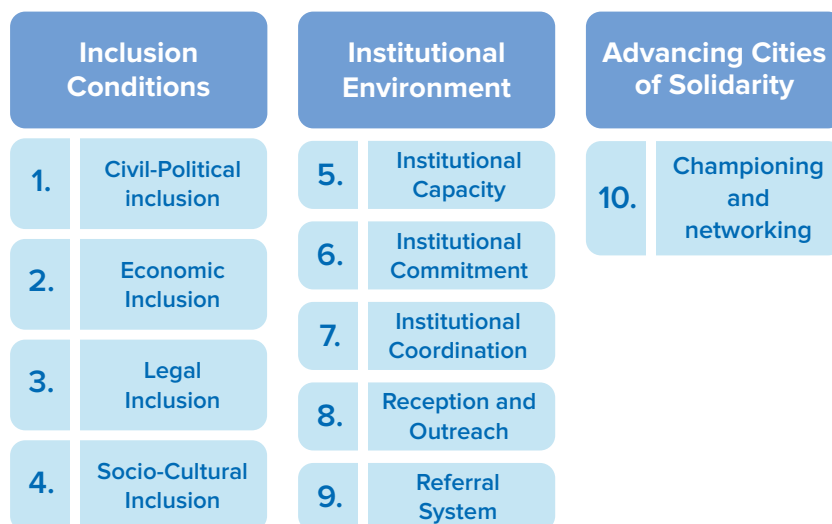
UNHCR's Europe Bureau has a [toolkit](#) for local authorities. The handbook, developed with the Migration Policy Group, aims to give practical guidance to local actors and to further inspire them to include refugees by providing clear and precise **guidelines for local authorities** to adopt a comprehensive approach to refugees' integration structured along six key areas.

The toolkit included practical checklists, good practices and step-by-step questions that can be used when designing or evaluating new measures. It is linked to evidence of existing good practices on socio-economic inclusion, effective access to rights and cultural integration.

Self-Assessment Tool and the 10 Criteria

The **self-assessment participatory tool** aims to provide diagnostics and prioritization of public policy issues connected to the inclusion of the people UNHCR serves. It is a reference framework developed

upon the **10 core criteria** used to guide cities and local authorities' efforts to enable the most effective inclusion factors for the people UNHCR serves and promote social cohesion.



The proposed self-assessment framework is composed by sets of questions organized by each of the ten criteria above. Each item of the self-assessment tool may perform three functions:

- a. Map current situation regarding the core aspects of each criteria.
- b. Analyse which concrete actions and attribu-

tions fall under the city's direct constitutional competences, and which government functions belong to other state levels.

- c. Identify potential commitments for improving or sustaining city's trajectory in the pathway to solidarity, understood as more inclusive conditions for the people UNHCR serves.

Other Relevant Initiatives and Tools

Global Cities Fund

UNHCR is a strategic partner with the Mayors Migration Council (MMC) on the Global Cities Fund⁹. The Fund provides financial assistance to cities for COVID-19 related projects supporting refugees, migrants, and IDPs. This multi-stakeholder initiative brings together the private sector, UNHCR, UN-

Habitat, IOM and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) to provide technical advice and support. So far nine cities have received the funds including Barranquilla and Medellin (Colombia), Lima (Peru), Quito (Ecuador), and Mexico City (Mexico).

Call to Local Action – Mayors Mechanism

The Call to Local Action is a **collaborative effort** between the Mayors Mechanism¹⁰ steering committee members – United Cities and Local Governments¹¹ (UCLG), the Mayors Migration Council¹² (MMC) and IOM – and is implemented in partnership with the UNHCR to fulfil both the Migration and Refugee

Global Compacts in unison while realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. It provides a **one-stop shop** for local and regional governments to input into the formal UN review processes of the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration.

Urban Inclusion Marker

Building on the guidelines and monitoring frameworks of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the 17 Goals of Sustainable Development (SDG) the [Urban Inclusion Marker](#)¹³ makes it possible to measure the aggregate level of inclusion of a city, considered as the ability to access goods, services and opportunities offered to its citizens in line with the notion of the “right to the city”. As a georeferenced composite

index, it allows to measure and present in a map the aggregate level of inclusion of a city and its potential contribution to spatial, social, economic and cultural integration of its inhabitants. The tool has been developed and implemented by UN-Habitat, UNHCR and OIM in the framework of the interagency project “Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity – CICS”.

⁹ <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf>

¹⁰ <https://www.mayorsmechanism.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.uclg.org/>

¹² <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/>

¹³ <https://ciudadesincluyentes.org/colombia/cucuta-villa-del-rosario/marcador-de-inclusion-urbana/>

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