Volunteering engages urban citizens and displaced persons as agents of change

The 11\textsuperscript{th} Dialogue on Protection Challenges of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees took place at the Palais des Nations on 18-19 December 2018. Discussions this year focused on the protection and assistance of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people in urban settings, particularly cities.

Toily Kurbanov, Deputy Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, participated in the dialogue, sharing UNV’s experience with
harnessing community support for refugees and mobilizing refugees as volunteers.

“Through volunteering, urban citizens and displaced persons are engaged as agents of change. UNV has developed new volunteer modalities on refugee and community volunteers and is ready to work with the UN Refugee Agency and other partners to put these into practice. --Toily Kurbanov, Deputy Executive Coordinator, UNV

Volunteers are on the frontlines of the global refugee response, fostering social cohesion and protecting and assisting the forcibly displaced men, women and children in their midst.

Earlier this year, UNV launched a pilot in North-East Nigeria to engage community members as UN Community Volunteers. This pilot is being implemented together with UNDP with funding support from the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) in communities hit hard by the Boko Haram insurgencies.

This new UN Volunteer modality subscribes to the principle that no-one should be left behind. UN Community Volunteers respond to the needs of UN agencies to have immediate interlocutors at the local level to do community mobilization, data collection, information sharing and coordination of activities, among other things.

It empowers communities and positions them squarely at the centre of UN projects, building on their local knowledge, access to networks and unique skills in adapting to challenging contexts.
Nurturing local volunteerism is a valuable way to bring unheard opinions, and know-how to the table, and helps to weave and strengthen the social fabric of all societies. --Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, International Volunteer Day 2018

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), cities are playing a growing role in supporting the displaced today, when around 60 per cent of the world’s 25.4 million refugees live not in camps but in cities and urban areas across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Addressing the opening plenary of the dialogue, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi welcomed the role of cities in leading the shift towards a more open and inclusive approach to refugees.

We think that an inclusive approach, based on investment in education and employment, is a much better and more sustainable, more dignified, model that really gives refugees opportunities for the future. --Filippo Grande, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

As part of the research for the State of the World’s Volunteerism Report 2018, The thread that binds, UN Volunteer Researchers Jimena Cazzaniga and Maria Fernanda Guzman, based in Bolivia, developed an infographic visualizing illustrating community volunteering.
The Annual Dialogue on Protection Challenges began one day after UN Member States agreed in the General Assembly on the Global Compact on Refugees – a new international framework that will transform the way the world responds to mass displacement and refugee crises, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them. The new global deal seeks to provide more robust support for the countries where most refugees live, and strengthen the shared responsibility to aid those who are forced to flee by conflict or persecution.

• SWVR

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals