

TUNISIA

30 November 2020

Mayors' Forum on Inclusive Cities in North Africa

More than 60 per cent of the world's refugees are sheltered in cities and towns across the globe. In Tunisia, three cities host most of the refugees and asylum-seekers present in the country: Grand Tunis (Tunis, Ariana, Manouba and Ben Arous governorates) with more than 2,695 refugees and asylum-seekers registered; Sfax hosting 1,243 and Medenine hosting 918 (as of 30 November 2020). The implication for municipalities is therefore a key element to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of persons of concern for UNHCR in their country of asylum.

The results of this implication and engagement of municipalities and civil society organizations are already visible in Tunisia. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdown, several mayors across the country launched an appeal for an amnesty and deferral of rent payments to landlords. The municipalities of La Marsa, Raoued and Ariana were on the frontline to act as mediators for rent deferral, preventing refugees and asylum seekers families being evicted. For the most complicated cases, the municipalities stepped in, covering the full or partial rent payment.

The discussions

On 10 – 11 November, Tunisia hosted the first (partially virtual) Mayor's Forum on Inclusive Cities in North Africa; organized by UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Middle-East and North Africa in collaboration with the Tunis Municipality, represented by the Mayor Ms. Souad Abdelrahim. Representatives from several North African municipalities, UNHCR representatives and civil society organizations took part in the two-day discussions, that followed a series of meetings and consultations at the local level.

The forum focused on four main themes: **1)** The role of cities in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees; **2)** The impact of refugee influx and inclusive socio-economic responses; **3)** Social inclusion and diversity and **4)** Entrepreneurship, jobs and livelihoods.

Main Forum outcomes

In her closing speech, the Mayor of Tunis summarized some proposals from Tunisian municipalities, stressing that Tunis would be ready to welcome an annual Municipalities Forum in collaboration with UNHCR and to further work on translating the following recommendations into action:

- Creating sections within municipality structures that are dedicated to the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. This would enable refugees and asylum-seekers to attend municipality meetings and contribute to local strategies.
- Launching an online platform aimed at promoting municipalities' best practices on protection of refugees and asylum seekers in the Middle-East and North Africa region.
- Supporting the creation of a legal framework for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers and advocating for a national refugee law.
- Coordinating with international organizations and development actors through the implementation of an economic and social response to refugees and asylum seekers needs.
- Working on dedicating resources for refugee/migrants services.
- Encouraging partnerships with the private sector to facilitate the recruitment of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Including refugees and asylum seekers in all cultural and artistic activities of the municipalities and encouraging their talents.



Participants to the Forum in Tunis ©UNHCR/C. Cavalcanti