

Global Refugee Forum Consultation in the Middle East

Diaspora and Refugee Workshop

Istanbul, 5th – 6th October 2019

Introduction

The DRC-organized consultation of diaspora and refugee organizations brought together sixteen people from the Middle East, whose organizations are all working to improve the well-being and uphold the rights of Afghan, Syrian and other refugees and asylum-seekers in their host countries. Nearly all of them are based in Turkey, with two organizations working on the welfare of Palestinians and Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan. Some of the organizations were working with communities in countries of origin as well.

The workshop engaged individuals in a day and a half of discussion, with the aim of ensuring that refugee and diaspora voices are heard at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019. The GRF has been organized as part of the follow up and accountability to the implementation of the Global Refugee Compact (GRC), and will be a forum for showcasing and discussing good practices in improving the lives of those in displacement, as well as making pledges to contribute to or support initiatives. The principle ‘audience’ for the GRF are the States who signed the Compact and who need to demonstrate their continued commitment to burden-sharing. However, in the spirit of the GRC, other actors such as private sector, NGOs, CSOs, development actors, etc. will be present, and it is important that progress and promises are monitored, and informed, those affected by displacement.

The purpose of the workshop was therefore to extract good ideas, map existing good practices, and provoke collaboration around pledges/commitments from those working at the grassroots level with refugees in the Middle East. The GRF has identified six areas of focus: arrangements for burden and responsibility-sharing, protection capacity, education, jobs and livelihoods, solutions, infrastructure and energy.

UNHCR made a presentation on identity documentation, statelessness, challenges to integration in particular in the areas of livelihoods and education, technological innovation in the areas of registration. UNHCR also presented interesting instances of existing MENA-based good practices, with some examples of ways in which diaspora organizations can contribute.

Discussion of themes, and outcomes

The working groups mainly chose to focus on protection, education, jobs and livelihoods, and energy and infrastructure, as ‘solutions’ outcomes such as resettlement and complementary pathways seem to be more within the remit of States. The ideas presented by the groups are shown in the tables below. Over-arching, repeated themes from the groups included:

- 1) The constraints faced by refugees because of the lack of adequate documentation, allowing them to move around the country, or to access services, housing, land and property (HLP), etc.

- 2) The exclusion of national NGOs and CSOs from refugee camps, and from certain sectors of service delivery to refugees, such as education, vocational training, legal support.
- 3) The detention and deportation of thousands of refugees, especially Afghans, from Turkey, without any media attention to the problem and protection referral pathways
- 4) The difficulties of living in Turkey as a refugee when access to employment and livelihoods is so limited, especially for the most remote and vulnerable groups
- 5) The challenges for refugees of retaining a cultural identity when they are not allowed to educate their children in the language of their country of origin
- 6) The need for donors, agencies and host governments to treat all refugees living within their borders equitably, not allowing one set of refugees better access to services than another

Since 2017 civil society organizations must get special permission to work with refugees in Turkey. The Afghan and Syrian organizations present at the workshop have no longer the permission to support and assist refugees in Turkey, which limit the number of good practices that could have been showcased in this document before 2017.

Working Groups – support to refugees in the Middle East

Protection of refugees in camps

Challenge/Gap/Need	Key allies/ responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Examples of existing good practices for better condition in camps	Recommendations / potential pledges ¹
<p>The isolation of refugees living in camps (which are being closed down slowly – only a population of 66,000 remains)</p> <p>The legal process of trying to seek status or integration is long, expensive and exhausting the refugees</p> <p>The fractions and conflict that existed in countries of origin are replicated in the camps</p>	Government, INGOs, UN	<p>Tracing mechanism for refugees to find one another when they don't have status or documentation in Izmir</p> <p>Very few examples as these organizations have no access to the refugee camps (camps are run by AFAN and the Red Crescent)</p>	<p>Life in camp should be a transition and should be short-term, limited time</p> <p>Legal situation and support provided to refugees should be systematic and universal; the same for all refugees Refugees should be required to provide less documentation</p>
Financial support to the camps is being reduced; camps are entirely donor dependent	Government, local authorities		Refugees should be provided with the opportunity to work or study outside the camp
Deportation centres	Government, INGOs, UN	Legal aid mechanisms to exist through bar associations, but access to the deportation centres is extremely limited	More transparency and access for NGOs, CSOs

¹ The participants are interested and willing to support these recommendations with their organizations in partnership with other stakeholders.

Protection of refugees in urban environments (systems, registration, status)

Turkish authorities in Istanbul and nine provinces on or near the Syrian border have stopped registering recently arrived Syrian asylum seekers since late 2017, early 2018. The suspension of temporary protection permit – or “kimlik,” as it is popularly called, is leading to deportations, coerced returns to Syria, and the denial of health care and education since the Turkish authorities consider Syrians denied registration to be in the country unlawfully. Turkey’s travel permit system for registered Syrians prohibits unregistered Syrians from traveling from border provinces to register elsewhere.

Challenge/Gap/Need	Key allies/ responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Examples of existing good practices for better condition in camps	Recommendations / potential pledges
Mobility, domestic, cross-border for refugees	Local authorities, government, INGOs, UN		Advocacy to promote complementary pathways and Labour Mobility for Refugees to work legally in other countries
Forcible return and deportation	Local authorities, government, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Allowing for return and re-return if there are no economic opportunities back home, and if returnees don't feel safe Transparency and information about deportation; UNHCR to strengthen its work/advocacy with Turkish government, particularly around risks to Afghan men who risk deportation
Discrimination against women in the provision of work permits	Local authorities, government, INGOs		Work permits should be more readily available to women applicants Need of advocacy
Access to services, finance, health care, education, banking, etc.	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs		Expand service provision, clearer information (including across the language barrier) about how to access services for all refugees
Registration, recognition of refugee status, application of legal framework, Birth Certificate	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs	One Syrian NGO helps refugees to move to areas where local authorities give registration, legal documents for refugees from areas where such service are closed (and the federal process takes a very long time)	Refugee rights to be universally respected and applied; advocacy needed to reduce discrimination Better communication and partnership with local authorities (good in Turkey) but should be consistent

Protection of refugees from abuse in urban environment

Challenge/Gap/Need	Key allies/ responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Examples of existing good practices for better condition in camps	Recommendations / potential pledges ²
Lack of reporting, referral channels for violations and discrimination	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Advocacy for refugee rights Information complaints mechanism Support, referrals, protection services
Lack of official IDs leaves refugees vulnerable for abuses, and discrimination in the labour market	government, NGOs, INGOs, UN		Information to refugees about their rights Support, referrals, protection services
Families putting pressure on children to work to contribute to family income	government, NGOs, INGOs, UN	Programme for child protection in Turkish province (which one?)	Financial support for families Need of a good referral system and access to work opportunities for the parents to allow the children to access education instead of working
Single men don't get access to financial support	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Equal support for all refugees
Lack of collaboration of local authorities to solve situation of abuse, and provide demographic information	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Associations working with refugees: it's key to work with local authorities: Campaign with Syrian organisations and Turkish authorities to allow Syrians from Istanbul to stay	Increasing collaboration among all the organizations working with refugees and local authorities
Lack of translators for Afghan, but for Syrian in health centres: discrimination	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Asam organization working with newly arrived women in need of immediate assistance and translation (hospital)	Advocacy towards donors to support all refugees equally
Discriminated access to schools: some for Turkish children only	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Advocacy to improve access to education for refugee children

² The participants are interested and willing to support these recommendations with their organizations in partnership with other stakeholders.

Education

Challenge/Gap/Need	Key allies/ responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Examples of existing good practices for better condition in camps	Recommendations / potential pledges
No authorization for CSOs to work in education in Turkey	Government, INGOs, UN, CSOs	Some organizations get authorization for short-term programmes in vocational training (Ex Syrian organization “Homs League Abroad” provide vocational training for female refugee widow in Antakya in partnership with a Turkish organization and with UNICEF funding)	CSOs are ready to fill gaps in the education sector, including teaching refugee children about their own culture and in their own language, if permission is given for this by the government Teachers from refugee communities should be recognized and allowed to work
Very limited funding for tertiary education activities; funding available is not equally available to all refugees (focus on Syrian refugees)	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Refugee-led organisations were providing these activities before 2017. They don't have the authorization anymore	Donors to provide funding for, and advocate for access for, all refugees equally
Refugee children are taught separately from Turkish children	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Advocacy with Turkish authorities to allow refugee children to study with Turkish children
Bullying and discrimination against refugee children in school	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		This discrimination should be addressed systemically

Work and livelihoods in urban environments

Challenge/Gap/Need	Key allies/ responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Examples of existing good practices	Recommendations / potential pledges ³
Difficulties of securing work permits for refugees – as a result refugees end up working in the informal sector	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Creation of dedicated committees to reach out to the private sector, connecting refugees to employers World Bank grant scheme implemented in partnership with the government to pay work insurance of refugees. Employer is paying the salary and commit to keep the worker for 6 additional months. This initiative accelerated the work permit process from the Turkish authorities	Funding to cover the cost of hiring refugees Incitement to employ refugees, to ease the financial pressure for the employers Volunteer and training programmes
Certifications and qualifications from home countries rarely recognized in host countries	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Advocacy to recognize the qualifications of refugees
Language barriers impede refugees from finding work	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Improved access to information on rights of refugees in labour issues
Lack of labour protection and insurance for refugees	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Job placement, working on protecting informal workers from losing salaries	Advocacy against abuse in the workplace of refugees (ex: teachers)

³ The participants are interested and willing to support these recommendations with their organizations in partnership with other stakeholders.

Energy and Infrastructure

Challenges/gaps/ need	Key allies/ responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Examples of existing good practice	Recommendations/ pledges
Lack of water and electricity in refugee camps in Lebanon	NGOs provide in the place of government		Need of sustainable infrastructures Clean energy should be supported in host countries
Challenges faced by refugees in securing rental housing in Turkey	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		CSO or NGO could provide guarantees to landlords for refugee/ migrant tenants Social media campaign to fight discrimination
Institutionalized discrimination: Turkey has a parallel system for health services to refugees	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Knowing who to target for each type of infrastructure services at different levels – e.g., municipal level; targeting at micro and macro levels	Health-care coverage in equity for all nationalities

Working groups – support to populations back home

Addressing causes of displacement

Challenges	Key allies/responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Good practice	Recommendations/ pledges
Security and state violence	Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, human rights orgs	Kesh Malek organization: Documentation of violations; empowering the grassroots aspects of sharing this information Human stories	Technical support needed from experienced international organizations, building the sustainability of this documentation in for example Idlib
Discrimination and targeting of minorities	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Door Beyond War – inclusion, participation and using a people-power lens	Empowering grassroots civil society; creating access and space for advocacy – global, local and political platforms
Economic collapse	Government, International community		Supporting reconstruction and peace-building

Religious or political persecution	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	(Kesh Malek) Working with survivors of detention to allow people to recover and integrate; to become advocates themselves, their voice and passion would be more effective Creating channels for civil society and individuals to access decision makers, e.g. of victim's initiative in Brussels, supporting survivors of detention network inside and outside Syria	Strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations
Returnees facing risks upon deportation to country of origin	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Do No Harm – Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development using this approach	Support from western and donor governments to apply pressure to governments in countries of origin not to persecute returnees

Strategic advocacy for populations back home

Challenges	Key allies/responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Good practice	Recommendations/ pledges
Detention and forced deportation	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Better conditions in deportations centres	Joint statements by CSOs around return Monitoring systems need to be put in place following returnees Improved accountability measures Awareness: sending returnees in another region is not return, but new IDPs
Normalization of narrative that it is safe to return	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Advocacy on eviction of Syrian refugees in the US; Voices of Syrians Platforms supported by DRC/DSP Syrian networks collaborating with Turkish local authorities for advocacy, advocacy to lift siege in Yarmouk camp	Wider, collective advocacy that returns be durable based on stability at home, funding for programmes in return communities Joint advocacy around keeping resettlement countries to their quotas
Discrimination in terms of work, lack of rights	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN		Advocacy to respect human rights

Partnerships, capacity building, business support

Challenges	Key allies/responsible stakeholders/ co-sponsors	Good practice	Recommendations/ pledges
Conflict, and a lack of safety and mobility for entrepreneurs in countries of origin	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Team of Syrian volunteers for info sharing: establishing radio channel of local media to share social information (gender issues) and reliable news about safety and security (roads, prices), awareness campaign about early marriage, hygiene, city cleaning information– this is being done in Aleppo	Collective action to provide guarantees for safe return
Difficulties of legally transferring funds from overseas because of anti-terror legislation	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	3 PTT branches (Turkish postal service) opened in Syria making available official money transfer in Syria, possible to track money transfer and allowing approved programmes to receive funding for example from UNICEF for the payment of Syrian teachers (used by 22 Orgs of Syrian NGO Alliance)	Local markets, entrepreneurship and rolling fund – allowing refugees to become donors themselves; raise money via crowdfunding from diaspora, etc.
Lack of technology/ infrastructure	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	<i>Door Beyond War</i> : Syrian diaspora initiative Social cohesion and participatory approach: Local market, micro-finance, crowd-funding model for diaspora and refugees to become the donors, supporters for local projects, with a revolving effect as the income from the project is used to support another project Hand in Hand: micro-finance to support IDPs that ended up supporting 2 families to voluntary return from Turkey	Financial support for shelter programmes must not diminish as there are important for safe and voluntary return Financial support from communities for voluntary return
Corruption, insecure land and property tenure, job security	Local authorities, government, NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, UN	Hand in Hand: Relying on available resources; the programme supports farmers to re-cultivate their land (cash, material) > 90% farmers went back to the agricultural fields and get income after the programme ended	Job guarantee from UN and INGOs if employees want to return in Syria to continue working for the same organization in their country of origin (fair salary scale)

Next Steps

Having concentrated during the workshop on achieving some degree of consensus and awareness of some of the good activities different organizations are engaged in the Middle East (mostly in Turkey), but also in countries of origin, or countries where refugee populations live near to home, the final session of the workshop was dedicated to examining how the workshop would yield results for the Global Refugee forum in December.

DRC reminded the group of the timing and content of the GRF: 16th – 18th December, a ministerial meeting but with space for civil society voices, and for side events, as well as showcased best practices.

Global online workshop

Next step in the process will be to select agreed priority topics from the Istanbul workshop to a global online workshop. The online workshop will discuss and – if possible – consolidate any messages that have come out from across the regional consultations with a view to present these at the GRF.

Selection of the Steering Committee

At the close of the meeting, DRC explained again to the group the process that lies ahead; the online global workshop, and the opportunity to submit online good practices, joint or bilateral pledges, for presentation on the UNHCR website. In order for the group to continue to work together, a steering committee was elected, consisting of the following five people:

- Oday Al Nasan
- Amany Qaddour
- Abd Jessry
- **Alireza Yasa**
- Karam Hilly

It was also agreed that of these, Alireza Yasa would represent the group at the GRF, and that Amany Qaddour would stand in for him in case of any difficulties with travelling, or with returning to Turkey. This selection was made at this point in order to begin early processing of the visa, with UNHCR's support.

Submissions of best practices or pledges can be made by any organization bilaterally to [UNHCR](#) (online or on the template documents shared at the meeting) or as part of an agreed, multi-stakeholder effort (preferred, and part of the desired outcome of the workshop).

As part of the process of bringing diaspora and refugee voices together to make a joint statement or position more powerful, the workshop report may be used to develop a statement or policy document for the GRF.

Milestones towards the Global Refugee Forum

1. Advocacy to influence or join [pledges](#) with other stakeholders > **up to December 2019**
2. Make and submit individual or joint [pledges](#) or [good practice](#) > **up to December 2019**
3. Global online Workshop with all the regional participants > **November 2019**



List of Participants, Istanbul 5-6 October

NAME	ORGANISATION
Abd Alwahab Jessry	Big Heart Foundation - Syrian NGO Alliance
Abdul Jalil Wafa	Afghan Refugees Association in Turkey
Alireza YASA	Afghan Refugees Solidarity Association (ARSA)
Amany Qaddour	Syria Relief & Development (SRD)
Ashley Jordan	Door Beyond War
Fadi Abu Halawa	Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development
Homaira Rahimi Mehraban	Asam
Isam Khatib	Kesh Malek Organization
Mahmoud Asvad	Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR)
Mohamad Oday Alnasan	Hand in Hand For Aid and Development
Mohammad Ali Hekmat	Afghan Refugees Solidarity Association (ARSA)
Nasiruddin Hussaini	Ignorant Refugees
Saadeddin dakhil	Human rights guardians
Tahareh Bakhshi	Afghan Refugees in Turkey/Bayburt
Ubeyde Abdulkader	Homs league abroad
Zafar Shayan Hamidi	Afgan Refugees in Turkey and also Erzurum Afghan Association.
Karam Hilly (not present, but elected in Steering Group)	Door Beyond War