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REPORT OF THE MIRPS WORKING GROUP ON LOCAL GOVERNANCE

2021



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INTRODUCTION

1.INTRODUCTION ----- 6

2.DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEMATIC SESSIONS ----- 7

3.EXPERIENCES AND INITIATIVES UNDERWAY IN MIRPS COUNTRIES ----- 8

4.OTHER GOOD PRACTICES IN THE REGION ----- 9

5.KEY CONSIDERATIONS RESULTING FROM THE FOUR WORK SESSIONS
CARRIED OUT BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP AND THE ADVISORY
PANEL, ACCORDING TO THE TOPICS ADDRESSED ----- 10

6.RECOMMENDATIONS ----- 11

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, the member countries of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) have defined the strengthening of the response and capacity of local authorities as a transversal regional priority. On the one hand, the integration of municipalities into the Initiative “Cities of Solidarity” was promoted, identifying 22 cities/urban localities, as suggested focus areas for future investments in the development of municipal capacities and collaboration. On the other hand, the States continued to develop and strengthen their National Action Plans, which include specific activities for local authorities in their strategic role of providing protection and solutions.

The Working Group on Local Governance is based on the Work Plan of the Pro-tempore MIRPS 2021 Presidency, in charge of the Republic of Guatemala. Its objective is to provide a platform for local authorities to share their experiences and expertise to ensure that people in need of international protection have access to services. In particular, the Working Group provides a common platform for the adaptation and integration of the best practices of the participating MIRPS countries, while taking advantage of the technical experience of other countries and international institutions with considerable experience in local governance.

The Working Group was composed of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama, who participated both from the central level and from their municipalities: Upala, Los Chiles, La Cruz, Escazú and Cantón San Carlos de Costa Rica; Esquipulas and Villa Nueva de Guatemala; San Pedro Sula de Honduras, and the municipality of Panama City, Panama.

During the development of the work of the Group, the MIRPS countries were accompanied by a panel of advisers made up of the Municipality of São Paulo, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Likewise, the Group was accompanied by the Technical Secretariat of the MIRPS (Organization of American States - OAS- and UNHCR).





2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEMATIC SESSIONS

The Working Group held four thematic sessions in July: the first session, held on July 6, addressed the legal frameworks regarding refugees and internally displaced persons and other specific characteristics of other vulnerable and at-risk populations; the second session, which took place on July 8, addressed the issue of coordination, partners and services; the third session, organized on July 27, on local development planning and multisectoral needs; and in the last session, which took place on July 29, presentations about community consultations, validation of local development plans, and representatives of local governments shared the preliminary results of their mapping of partners and services.

3. EXPERIENCES AND INITIATIVES UNDERWAY IN MIRPS COUNTRIES

- In Costa Rica, they have a National Integration Plan, which seeks to guarantee the integration and social inclusion of the refugee and migrant population in the country, promoting equal opportunities, equity and respect for human rights, through joint and articulated work of public and private institutions, to comprehensively improve social, economic and cultural spaces. As an example of integration, the Information Desk for Migrants is presented in the Municipality of Upala, where information about rights, immigration procedures, requirements and others are offered for free and promptly. In addition, the initiative “Mercadito Upaleño”, of the UNHCR, Fundación Mujer and the Municipality of Upala, constitutes a space for the development of enterprises for nationals and asylum seekers, which promotes inclusion, development and the prevention of xenophobia. Challenges are identified as: the generation of more opportunities to respond to the growing demand for services; the strengthening of coordination and communication between the institutions and the different sectors involved. For its part, the Municipality of Los Chiles also has a support office for assistance to refugees and migrants. Likewise, the Municipality of Escazú is open to generating projects for the inclusion of displaced persons. The Municipality of La Cruz coordinates with different organizations such as UNHCR, HIAS and IOM, for training at the institutional level and community organizations on the issue of refuge and orientation for migrants. They have also coordinated with the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners for the accompaniment with the “Migramóvil”, Youth Conference and humanitarian assistance in the context of COVID-19. The Canton of San Carlos aids from the Directorate of Local Development, with programs such as “Sembremos Seguridad”, which assists displaced persons and members of the host community.
- In Guatemala, the Municipality of Esquipulas is part of the “Cities of Solidarity” initiative. Its focus is on recovering public spaces, promoting awareness and integration messages, expanding health services and improving conditions in local schools. Esquipulas is projected as a municipal space for inter-institutional coordination, which promotes actions focused on the protection of groups in vulnerable situations in coordination with the Municipal Commission for Food and Nutrition Security, the Municipal Commission for Children and Adolescents, the Municipal Commission for the Prevention of Violence and the Departmental and Cross-Border Technical Board for the Protection of Migrants and Refugees, as well as with the Ministries of the Government, Public Health, Agriculture, Livestock and Food, Education, Social Development, international organizations and civil society organizations. Different projects, programs and actions have been carried out to benefit groups in vulnerable situations.
- In Honduras, the Municipality of San Pedro Sula has developed specialized care for people displaced by violence. Through the Management of Support for the Provision of Social Services, a Technical Committee for the Response to Forced Displacement and a focal point to provide care for people displaced by violence and returned migrants with protection needs were installed. The focal point identifies and deals with cases of acts of violence such as threats against life and physical integrity by maras or gangs, threats of eviction, sexual harassment, sexual violence based on gender, domestic violence within the family, and forced recruitment by maras or gangs. The components of the assistance that has been provided are follow-up for internal relocation, temporary emergency accommodation, hygiene and hygiene kit, mental health care or psychological care, temporary emergency accommodation, emergency transfer, and assessment and physical health care.
- In Panama, the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) coordinates with the municipalities of Chiriquí and Darién, to reinforce awareness and identify mixed movements if any person requires international protection. In the Municipality of Panama City, attention routes have been developed in cases of gender-based violence in host communities.

4. OTHER GOOD PRACTICES IN THE REGION

- UNDP shared an experience in Mexico on multi-stakeholder coordination at the municipal level and mappings of partners and services to inform a planned response. A social cohesion strategy was implemented at the community level that involved coordination between different actors. Dialogue processes were used in public spaces and supported by community leaders. Participants recognized the local actors who contribute to people on the move, but also identified that, in some cases, host communities were unaware of the local services available to care for displaced people. They carried out an intervention for local governments to identify the national government funds that they can access. Likewise, in Mexicali, Puebla, they have international volunteers who help with awareness and social communication campaigns. With the “Intégrate” Strategy, they provide support to people in the context of human mobility, migrants, returnees, internally displaced persons, among others. They have identified people with special needs regarding immigration procedures, coordination and management of shelters, support in matters of nationality, employment relationships, and job offers according to their interests. They also identified needs from the companies such as: raising awareness in the private sector about migration recruitment and documentation processes, interest in participating in the virtual field of the strategy in terms of training and awareness, training staff on migration issues, labor insertion of migrants, and bank accounts with some institutions.
- Likewise, UNHCR presented a good practice carried out in Colombia, by the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration Flows -GIFFM- in the context of COVID-19. The Group has 47 members, including 14 United Nations agencies, 29 civil society organizations and four members of the International Red Cross Movement, organized in subsectors: shelters, health, legal, food, water and sanitation, among others. Mapping of services is essential in responding to emergencies. The municipality led the implementation of activities of the work plan prepared by the Group, including the management of 3 temporary shelters.
- The Municipality of São Paulo, Brazil, has adapted municipal services to attend displaced people. They have a Municipal Council of Immigrants, a Municipal Policy Plan for Migrants, which includes care for displaced people. Likewise, they have developed agreements with the Federal Banks to facilitate the opening of bank accounts, training programs for public officials, health services, Portuguese teaching programs in municipal schools, among others.



5. KEY CONSIDERATIONS RESULTING FROM THE FOUR WORK SESSIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP AND THE ADVISORY PANEL, ACCORDING TO THE TOPICS ADDRESSED

Regarding the normative frameworks related to displaced persons:

- With the accompaniment of UNHCR and UNDP, the first session was dedicated to reviewing the normative frameworks and principles applicable to refugees and internally displaced persons. The refugee protection regime is built under four pillars: the recognition of the human right to seek and receive asylum, the establishment of UNHCR, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the complementarity and convergence between the International Law of refugees, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law. Unlike refugees, internally displaced persons do not have a special legal status. Displaced persons are always nationals of the State, experiencing a specific situation, and their legal status is that of a citizen within the territory of their State.
- Recognizing the specific needs of each group, according to regulatory frameworks, is the first essential step in organizing services at the local level.

On the specific needs of childhood and adolescence:

- With the advice of UNICEF, the increase in human mobility of girls, boys and adolescents was analyzed. These children and adolescents present two conditions of vulnerability: they are children and are in a context of mobility.
- Addressing the structural causes of displacement and migration of children and adolescents is challenging. Some of these causes are forced recruitment by organized crime, gangs, violence; inequality and poverty; family reunification and natural disasters, among others.
- We are in a context demanding institutional responses that are close, effective and specialized; Latin America has made progress in the conformation of comprehensive systems that guarantee the protection of children, including those in situations of human mobility, but it is still necessary to continue strengthening these specialized systems for the protection of children, including displaced and migrant children.
- It is important to support the opening of spaces for listening and participation of displaced children and adolescents at the local level, so they can become aware and know the services they receive, as well as the expectations they have about them.

On the role of local governments:

- The local is a strategic space to provide coordinated responses in the territory, oriented to the protection of displaced persons and to influence responses to address the structural causes of such displacement.
- Local governments are strengthening their knowledge and technical capacities to deal with public management and the production of quality people-centered public services. The new context of the COVID-19 pandemic has given local governments the opportunity to transcend from security actions to an agenda of solutions, oriented towards socio-economic inclusion and the recognition of rights.
- The local becomes strategic because it becomes a “hinge” that allows coordination between the national and decision-making levels, and the community levels linked to civil society. It also facilitates the generation of data and evidence that facilitate decision-making and the construction of mechanisms for measuring results and progress.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are practical recommendations derived from the exchange of experiences during the four work sessions. The Working Group on Local Governance endorses the following practical recommendations that aim to protect and generate solutions for displaced persons.

- 1.Designation of focal points within the municipalities that are in charge of actions, plans and programs related to protection and solutions for displaced populations.
- 2.Promotion of municipal policies and plans that integrate and institutionalize the initiatives underway.
- 3.Consolidation of local governments as primary actors in the first line of response and in the generation of comprehensive responses, coordinating all local actors, such as youth and women's organizations, international organizations, civil society and the private sector.
- 4.Promote inter-institutional spaces in the management of information, the design of policies, plans and action programs based on evidence and with quality public service solutions focused on people.
- 5.Promote local solutions for (i) evidence-based strategic planning and territorial targeting with quality public services centered on people, through inclusive participation processes; (ii) design and implementation of initiatives with a human rights approach, ensuring access to justice and promoting transparency and access to information initiatives with open government tools, and (iii) solutions and initiatives aimed at socio-economic integration and social cohesion, compared to the traditional approach to addressing challenges from a security perspective.
- 6.Strengthening of specialized protection for children, including municipal governments as part of the local subsystem for comprehensive protection.
- 7.Incorporation of forced displacement in Local Development planning, to identify and characterize displaced people in their municipalities, and develop diagnoses of the needs of displaced people with a gender perspective.
- 8.Integration of displaced populations and host communities through dialogue processes at the community level, for the development and participatory consensus of priority actions in municipal plans.
- 9.Design of a roadmap for the consolidation of the processes of incorporation of forced displacement in local development planning, to guarantee protection and access to basic services, electronic governance, socioeconomic integration and social cohesion, through of the use of the toolbox "Facing the challenges of forced displacement", of the UNDP-UNHCR Regional Governance Framework.
- 10.Consolidation of the participating municipalities as allies of the MIRPS that are spokespersons for the protection and generation of solutions for displaced populations in other municipalities.
- 11.Promotion of the integration of more municipalities and the Federations of Municipalities of the MIRPS countries in the Working Group and in the implementation of commitments of the national action plans.
- 12.Support for the implementation of MIRPS commitments related to actions at the local level, to facilitate the inclusion of displaced persons and articulation with other MIRPS Working Groups with common objectives, such as the Group on Access to the Labor Market and Professional Training or the Group on Internal Displacement.
- 13.Availability of an online platform, where information on the rights of refugees and displaced persons is shared, which also serves as a platform for answering questions.
- 14.Strengthening asylum systems and protection mechanisms, guaranteeing protection actions for women, unaccompanied children and adolescents and the LGBTQ + community.
- 15.Promotion of Strategies for the social and economic integration of people in contexts of human mobility. Collaboration and creation of networks at the local level of government authorities, the private sector, NGOs and international organizations that benefit the integration of said population from a context of socioeconomic development, encouraging individual attention and promoting the overcoming of previously identified vulnerabilities. The foregoing through the use of digital platforms.

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