

Forced displacement and development

PLATFORMA's comments on the non-paper for expert consultations

PLATFORMA -the European network of local and regional governments (LRGs) active in the field of development cooperation – wants to convey the following messages on the topic of forced displacement and development. Although the ambition to revise the response to forced displacement in order to better incorporate a developmental perspective is fully valid and welcome, the non-paper leaves a number of issues unaddressed, particularly regarding the involvement and role of the local governments in the new approach.

- **The engagement of local governments (LGs) throughout the project cycle is essential**

Most displaced populations in protracted situations are located in urban areas¹, which makes communication with LGs essential for the success of external assistance in this area. Though this is positively recognised in the non-paper, it needs to be more precise in how this communication should be devised: LGs must be engaged as early as in the project inception phase, through participation in needs assessments taking the form of community discussions, and be sustained throughout the implementation of the project via their participation in steering committees with supervisory roles.

- **Support to decentralisation is a precondition for stronger communication with LGs**

PLATFORMA not only advocates for stronger communication with LGs, but also for stronger communication with *stronger* local governments. If the latter are to develop their full potential as partners in helping forcibly displaced populations, the European Union (EU) must further encourage host national governments to promote decentralisation processes, leading to increased competences in service delivery and fiscal matters. Indeed, the limited competencies LGs have in a number of developing countries do not facilitate the resolution of protracted crises. In order to push for this greater decentralisation, the EU should make use of the variety of external assistance programmes and instruments at its disposal and take advantage of the process of revision in place to adjust them accordingly.

- **The potential of decentralised cooperation should be recognised**

By the same token, the future communication must strongly emphasise that city to city cooperation helps boosting LGs' capacities in such areas as urban planning, local economic development and service delivery, bearing in mind that municipalities themselves can better assess local needs in terms of territorial development. European cities have over the years built an extensive network of partners in developing countries, through twinning projects and/or participation in joint fora and associations. This could be particularly helpful when reaching out to LGs in countries affected by protracted crises in order to bring them on board and encourage their participation in programmes. We hence believe it is time for European Union institutions to tap into this insufficiently exploited resource.

- **Integrating development actors to address forced displacement is a welcomed approach**

PLATFORMA fully agrees with the non-paper's general idea that forced displacement, particularly in the context of protracted crises, needs to be approached from both a humanitarian and a developmental perspective. Only a comprehensive strategy can fully address this challenge. It is also important to

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4b0e4cba6.html>

highlight the linkages between this topic and the ongoing discussions at the global level. PLATFORMA welcomes the reference to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which should become the main guiding reference when revisiting policies in this area. The future communication should equally be fed by and closely monitor the UN Habitat III process, as inclusiveness and integration of migrant communities is one of its main themes.

- **Seeking alternatives to camps must be part of the new approach on forced displacement**

The non-paper makes an important distinction between refugees living in camps and those living in rural or urban areas. There are specific challenges to each of these settings, hence the need for tailored approaches. However, the future communication should consider pursuing alternatives to camps as one of the pillars of the new approach, since self-reliance opportunities are very limited in a camp setting. A stronger political dialogue at the level of national governments is necessary. At the same time, the upgrading of slums and the design of participatory and integrated urban strategies at local level can contribute to the integration and self-reliance of displaced persons.

- **Local government-led service delivery benefits host communities and displaced people**

Improving the delivery of services such as education and infrastructure is essential to improve the living conditions of displaced populations and host communities. While the non-paper recognises this, the communication should state more clearly the important role local authorities can play in this respect. Local authorities are widely recognised for being closer to the citizens and for better knowing their needs. Hence, and as it was already mentioned, this approach needs of a stronger support to decentralisation processes, as this can be beneficial to both host populations and refugees.

- **Assistance needs to aim at empowering displaced populations**

As the non-paper points out, assistance to displaced populations should seek self-reliance. Indeed, cash and voucher-based assistance, rather than in-kind assistance, do constitute a step forward, as it gives beneficiaries a greater say in the type of help they receive. Yet these fall short of achieving the goal of empowering them. The withdrawal of restrictions on the access to the labour market is an important precondition for building livelihoods for displaced people, requiring of a dialogue at the highest level with national governments. If allowed to work, migrants can have, as pointed out by a number of studies², a positive impact on local economic growth and LGs' tax revenue. Moreover, LGs can again play an essential role in providing migrants with information on the local labour market and facilitating the matching of skills with the demand from local SMEs. It is also important to keep in mind that local authorities with strengthened prerogatives in service delivery can become important sources of employment and, hence, of livelihoods.

PLATFORMA is the network of local and regional governments (LRGs), and their associations, active in the field of development cooperation between Europe and partner countries. PLATFORMA has 34 members: national, European and international associations, as well individual local and regional governments. The Secretariat is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (more information on www.platforma-dev.eu).

Since its launch, PLATFORMA has actively engaged with the European institutions to inform and constructively participate in shaping the EU development policy with two main objectives; i. strengthening EU support to local governance in partner countries and, ii. strengthening EU support to decentralised cooperation as an implementation means of development cooperation.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Strategic partnership with the European Commission Directorate-General for International Development and Cooperation, whereby signatories commit to take actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequality, and to promote democracy and sustainable development.

² <http://www.oecd.org/migration/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf>