Host Municipalities Network Webinar

Data production for strengthening social cohesion in host communities

April 26th, 2017

This Host Municipalities Network Webinar on Data production for strengthening social cohesion in host communities gathered together about 30 participants coming from both local governments and development organizations in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the US. The participants discussed virtually on municipalities’ strategies and methods in data collection and analysis with regard to strengthening social cohesion in contexts of high refugee influx, showcased by the three main speakers.

Context and Rationale

Following the Peer-to-Peer Learning Workshop: Strengthening Social Cohesion in Municipalities Hosting Refugees co-organized by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) on November 11-12, 2016 in Sanliurfa and Gaziantep, Turkey, local government representatives from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey acknowledged that although there is no blueprint solution for strengthening social cohesion between refugees and their hosts, collaboration and experience-sharing on how to use reliable data on social cohesion are highly valuable. Following the outcomes of the workshop, this webinar aimed to 1) discuss the importance and relevance of data for strengthening social cohesion; 2) identify the main challenges for municipalities hosting large numbers of refugees related to data gathering and analysis; and 3) identify best practices in data gathering for strengthening social cohesion and explore their possible replication in other contexts.

Summary of Discussion and Lessons Learnt

Mrs. Farah Choucair (UNDP, Regional Bureau for Arab States, Lebanon) focused on the importance of data production to strengthen social cohesion by presenting the multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept by UNDP in Lebanon: The UNDP-RBAS Social Cohesion Index is an analytical tool of the Project Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region (PSCAR) comprising core indicators (e.g. collective action), medial indicators (e.g. identity dynamics) and peripheral indicators (e.g. threat). By collecting data through population surveys, opinion polls etc. different socio-cultural contexts of refugee tensions are captured and hence, community mechanisms to resolve tensions can be drawn.

Mrs. Theodora Manolakos (Municipality of Vienna, Austria) illustrated the city of Vienna’s innovative approach for data collection to strengthen social cohesion. By monitoring integration and diversity through quantitative and qualitative methods, socially cohesive processes are made empirically visible. By collecting data in 8 areas of life (e.g. political participation, health), using 60 integration indicators (e.g. residence integration) and 11 integration benchmarks, (in-)equality is monitored, measured and evaluated on a regular basis (more information about this project available here and here, and the European Handbook on Equality Data available here).

Mr. Imad Issa (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Jordan) explained that the involvement of municipalities’ local development units in data collection and analysis is key. Hence, planning approaches and methods can be developed. First, issues and / or opportunities for collecting data should be identified through internal and external assessments, also keeping in mind the specific contexts belonging to different municipalities. Best practices in collecting data
include surveys, interviews, observed data etc. The documentation of data as well as receiving feedbacks from citizens is important to improve such approaches.

Main messages and recommendations

1. Importance and relevance of data collection

- **Data monitoring is key for strengthening social cohesion**: 1) social cohesion indexes serve as a proof to identify core causes of social tensions in municipalities; 2) It is of particular importance to handle these data over to practitioners in order to identify community mechanisms, adjust programs accordingly and better design in terms of targets (e.g. in Turkey, IMPR Humanitarian matches Turkish labor demand with Syrian offer).
- **Evidence-based data** is needed to implement adequate programs on social cohesion.
- **Key principles of equal data collection** for strengthening social cohesion are important. E.g. the city of Vienna has four core principles of data collection: 1) Quality; 2) Continuity; 3) Adequacy and 4) Comprehensibility. By focusing on these four principles, data is required on a regular basis, determined by statistic methods and professional ethics. Moreover, approaches on categorization and standardization principles are used.
- **The quality of data on social cohesion needs to be improved** in cooperation with those who produce and collect them, in particular to guarantee the validity of equality indicators.
- **When measuring social cohesion, no differentiation should occur between information on refugees and local communities** (e.g. in interviews). Statistics should merge these data in order to achieve a better political implementation. Differentiations can however be focused along other themes, such as ethnic background, age, sex, etc.
- The framework for measuring social cohesion within the region should involve **measuring refugee participation within the host society and comparing this with the host community's response to the refugee population**. Hence, the impact of programs and policies designed to provide services to the refugees at local, regional and national levels can better be measured, as well as responses of host communities towards these groups.
- **The outcomes of monitoring have an influence on the political discussion**, as data collection leads to outcomes on trends and developments.

2. Main Challenges in data gathering and analysis

- **The issue of social cohesion and social inclusion is not yet accepted by local leaders in terms of policies**. Good practices come from partnerships with agencies.
- Another challenge concerns the **terminology: social cohesion versus social inclusion**. A terminology debate is necessary in order to create a common understanding (e.g. in front of journalists, who at times have bad connotations of social cohesion and nationalism). So far, the concept of social cohesion seems to be better perceived in host municipalities than the concept of social inclusion (e.g. in Lebanon, integration of refugees is understood as temporary). Another related challenge concerns the terminological examination on the political level regarding the definition of **social cohesion versus social stability**.
- **Technical challenges** include displacement and mobility, sampling bias, baseline, trust, design of questionnaire, etc.
- Other challenges for data collection include **recurrent violent incidents or tensions** that affect (volatile) perceptions as well as differences in the **sensitivity of host countries** in this regard. We also have to bare in mind the **different situations in host municipalities impacting data collection** (e.g. in Lebanon, economic situation leads to social tensions).
More frequent data is expensive and municipalities often lack capabilities of financing this.

A disregard of basic principles of good data is noticeable (e.g. not measuring facts of inequality).

Presenting indicators and results adequately (e.g. as maps, tables etc.) can also be a challenge for actors involved.

Regarding the forms of data production, surveys can be difficult to allow for comparability over time.

At times, there are misleading interpretations of data when they are published.

Recommendations for follow-up

Participants underlined the need to have more exchanges with both MENA and European experiences, e.g. through an ad-hoc seminar, on the following topics:

- How to gather data on social cohesion (by conducting perception surveys, opinion polls, interviews etc.) related to the host community – refugee tensions in order to find out how and why these tensions are appearing, hence identify community mechanisms to resolve them.
- How to analyze the results of collected data on social cohesion.
- How to solve the challenges related to data management, e.g. sharing data with other municipalities or organizations involved.

Other recommendations were the following:

- Possibility for municipalities to share data with NGOs allowing them to use these data for activity planning;
- Development of a platform for having an overview on the capacity of host municipalities in collecting data to strengthen social cohesion;
- Identification of barriers and gaps of municipalities to collect data on social cohesion (lack of finances, lack of human resources, missing legislative framework etc.)
- Continuation of the exchange with other MENA and European experiences;
- There is a need to conduct exercises for actors involved on how to implement samplings without partiality.

Next steps:

- Regular updates and follow-up through the Host Municipalities Network – virtual platform.