

Municipal Guide

Successful Municipal Strategies to
Respond to the Syria Refugee Crisis

Objective of Municipal Guide

In Lebanon, municipalities are the frontline response to refugee and host community needs. Mayors, vice-mayors and municipal staff are challenged daily to meet the increasing requests of their constituents with scarce resources, while simultaneously remedying the effects of the Syria refugee crisis. Faced with issues such as job competition, rising food and fuel prices and higher housing costs and strained municipal systems with limited capacity, municipalities are trying their best to meet the growing challenges. Although the central government issued a decision mandating that municipalities take actions to respond to the Syria refugee crisis, little support or guidance has been provided to municipalities to help them cope with these issues. Tasked with registering new arrivals, maintaining security, ensuring adequate water and sanitation services, providing shelter, as well as mediating community tensions, municipalities are struggling to cope with the increasing pressure on their communities and resources. However, there are bright spots and success stories on how municipalities are responding to the Syria refugee crisis.

Mercy Corps, through funding from the British Embassy in Beirut, along with twelve municipalities joined together to share, exchange and discuss successful and effective responses that municipalities have implemented to manage the Syria refugee crisis. While limited financial resources continues to be a primary issue for municipalities in responding to the crisis, there are still innovative and exemplary ways that municipalities have responded, which are highlighted in this municipal guide. This guide will be circulated and shared to other municipalities to serve as a guide to responding to the Syria refugee crisis.

Methodology: How This Study Was Conducted

Mercy Corps partnered with three municipal unions located in the North, Bekaa, and South Governorates and selected four municipalities within each union to conduct a comprehensive assessment on municipal responses to the crisis.

North – Dannieh Union

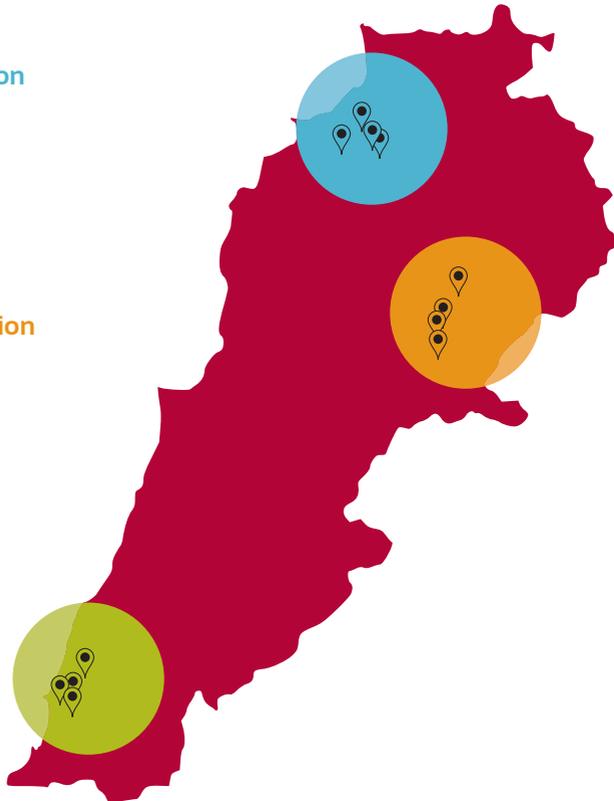
- Assoun
- Bikasfreen
- Deir el Nbouh
- Mrah al Sraj

Bekaa - Baalbeck Union

- Baalbeck
- Doures
- Makna
- Tybeh

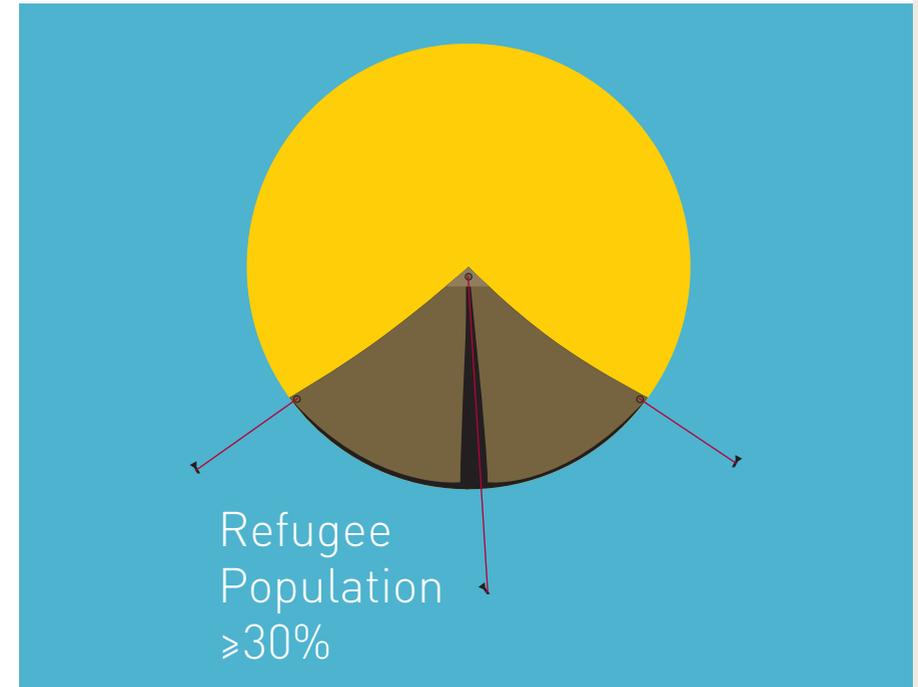
South - Tyre Union

- Bazourayeh
- Bidyes
- Bourj el Shamale
- Ein Baal



MUNICIPALITY SELECTION CRITERIA:

Mercy Corps focused on selecting municipalities from UNHCR's 225 vulnerable cadastrals list. After reviewing the list, we used the following selection criteria:



- Municipalities with a refugee population of at least 30%;
- Municipalities that demonstrated a response to refugee and host issues in some capacity through provisions of services, material support/relief, security, or administrative issues;
- The unions selected have a mix of municipalities with high and low administrative capacity and resources;
- Mercy Corps had an existing relationship with the union and/or municipality to facilitate access.

ASSESSMENTS CONDUCTED WITH MUNICIPALITIES:

Mercy Corps implemented four surveys with the twelve targeted municipalities. These multi-dimensional surveys captured the key information used to develop this guide. In addition to these survey tools, twenty-four focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in total: two were conducted in each municipality, one with the host community and one with the Syrian refugee population.

Survey 1: Municipal responses to Syria Crisis

This survey was conducted with mayors, vice-mayors, and municipal staff to obtain a better understanding of what actions municipalities have taken to respond to the Syrian crisis. This includes consideration for the influx of refugees, rationale for actions taken, actors involved, coordination and planning, results and accomplishments, lessons learned and challenges, as well as the current assessment of what needs to be improved.

Survey 2: Inventory of municipal-level projects

This survey was conducted with mayors, vice-mayors and municipal staff to learn about previous and current efforts to build municipal abilities through understanding the type of support they receive (capacity building, material support, etc.); who provides support (national, international or multilateral actors); what projects were developed or implemented; funding mechanisms; existing social capital, and emergency preparedness.

Survey 3: Service provision

This survey was conducted with organisations providing services, assessments or projects within the municipalities to understand the technical scope and scale of services provided and what enables/prevents service provision.

Survey 4: Public perception survey

The final survey was conducted with the public, including both the host community and Syrian refugee population, from the participating municipality to obtain a better understanding of how members of the host and refugee community perceive municipal responses to the crisis.

Through Mercy Corps's extensive study, we evaluated and analysed the actions taken on the municipal-level to manage local resource needs and tensions generated by the Syrian crisis. In addition, we conducted a comparative assessment of municipal-responses to determine successful and effective actions. These tactics are outlined in this guide in order to widely circulate to municipalities effective municipal-strategies to improve responses on a national-scale.

It is crucial that more is done to empower municipalities to respond to the crisis and to ensure that they are included as primary actors in a national-response strategy among the central government, donors, and humanitarian organisations.

To inform this guidebook, Mercy Corps conducted in-depth assessments with 12 vulnerable municipalities in the Bekaa, North, and South Lebanon governorates. The following data highlights municipalities' needs, abilities and interests. Municipalities provided multiple responses, which are indicated below:

What motivates municipalities to assist refugees?

- 60% sense of moral obligation and humanitarian concern
- 20% sense of common heritage and culture
- 13% desire to reciprocate support from 2006 invasion

What actions did municipalities implement to respond to the Syria crisis?

- 100% registered refugees
- 100% provided housing assistance
- 100% facilitated access to health care
- 89% provided food and non-food items
- 78% increased security presence in community
- 78% provided dispute mediation between refugee and host community members

NGO support to municipalities:

- 64% indicated that local and international organizations helped them respond to the Syria refugee crisis

What recommendations do municipalities suggest for improving relations between Lebanese and refugees?

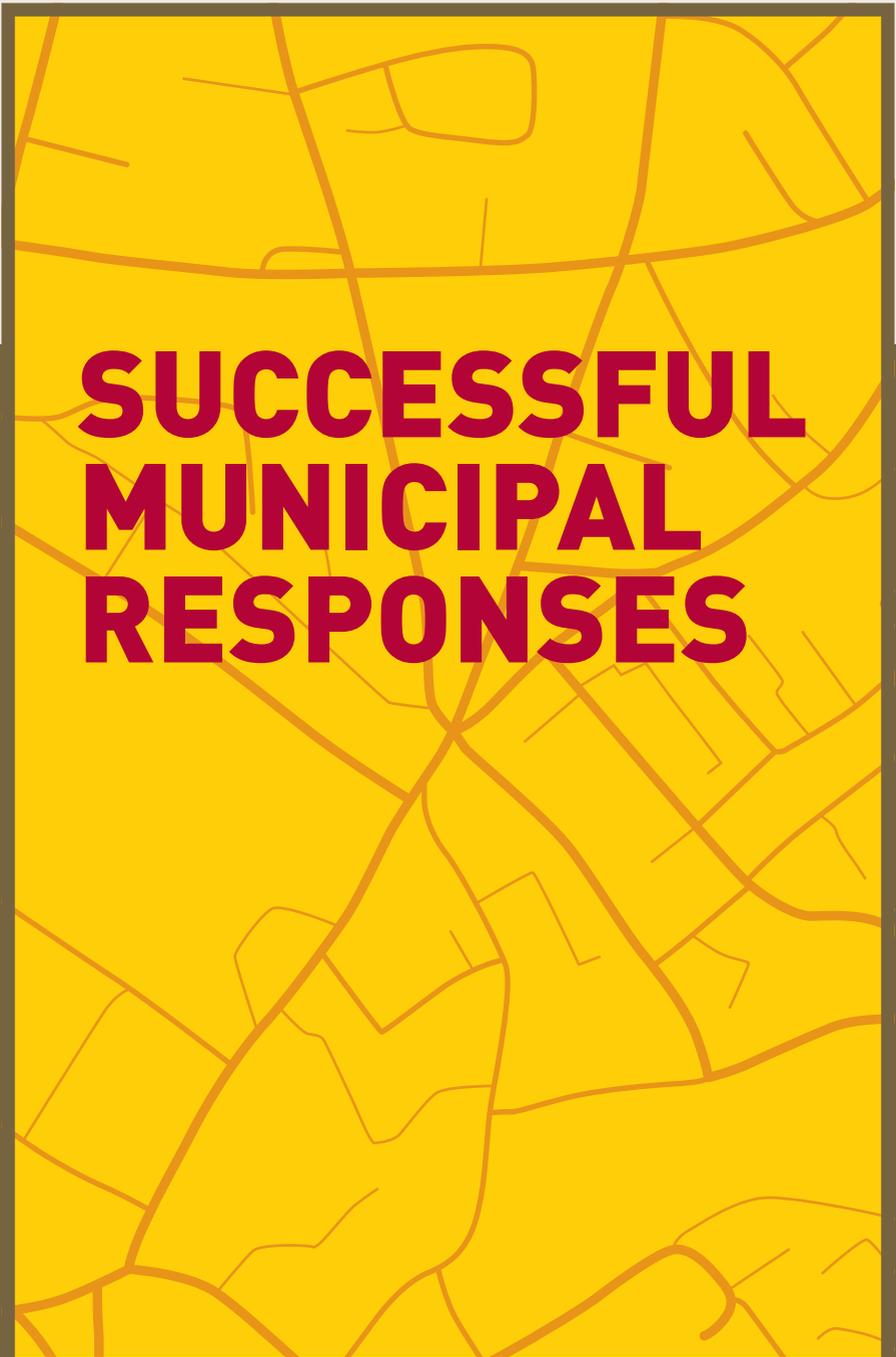
- 29% suggest promoting mutual trust and confidence between host/refugee communities
- 21% suggest providing social support and employment opportunities
- 21% suggest balancing services between refugees and needy Lebanese households

What are municipal primary needs as a result of the Syria refugee crisis?

- 91% lack of resources and funding
- 79% service delivery
- 50% collaboration with central government

What do municipalities cite as their greatest needs to improve municipal-level responses?

- 79% additional resources and funding
- 71% service delivery (water, sanitation, electricity, education, health care)
- 43% greater collaboration and involvement of central government



SUCCESSFUL MUNICIPAL RESPONSES



LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY

Response 1: Motivation & Initiative

Objective 1.1: Heads of Municipalities dedicate time to Syrian Refugee response

→ *Municipal Action: It is essential and advisable for the Heads of Municipalities to dedicate significant time and effort to responding to the refugee crisis and its effects. This will help build the community's confidence in the municipal leadership.*

Objective 1.2: Pre-plan to prevent problems

→ *Municipalities are advised to plan ahead for potential problems and brainstorm possible solutions to prevent increased community tension or worsen humanitarian conditions. This pre-planning will allow the municipality to respond quickly, as needed. By informing other actors of these contingency plans, the municipality will respond in a more coordinated manner.*

Objective 1.3: Focus on communication mechanisms and improving municipal visibility

→ *Regularly communicate with the municipality about how it is responding to demands upon itself. Frequent speeches, public statements, radio interviews and/or newspaper articles can support this effort to positively project how the municipality is responding.*

Response 2: Allowing Organisations Access to Implement Services within Municipalities

Objective 2.1: Municipalities establish cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships with organisations through strong communication mechanisms.

→ *Municipal Action: A key way to establish strong relationships is for municipalities to be responsive and organised when collaborating with humanitarian organisations, which makes working relationships stronger, and consequently, a greater impact on the community.*

Objective 2.2: Municipalities are able to contact organisations to request specific services based on community needs.

→ *Municipal Action: Municipalities have taken initiative and contacted organisations to specifically request services they lack.*

Municipal Example: Municipality N had approximately 300 families, but received only 75 winter kits. They contacted other organisations to see if they could cover the difference and eventually they were able to collect a sufficient amount of kits for the remaining families in their municipality.

Response 3: Invite Donors to Municipalities to Learn About Needs

Objective 3.1: Municipalities are advised to actively learn about the services of donors and NGOs.

→ *Municipal Action: Consult with Heads of Municipalities and municipal staff in your region and other areas about the organisations that are currently implementing services in their municipality and learn about the type of services currently being implemented. Moreover, attend regional and/or national meetings with humanitarian organisations to develop bilateral relationships with NGOs.*

Objective 3.2: Request meetings with donors to inform them about the needs of your respective municipality and request their assistance and services.

→ *Municipal Action: After you have learned about the myriad of services and projects being implemented in your area and beyond, determine what type of support your municipality primarily needs. Then create a list of donors you can possibly reach out to and make contact with them to invite them to your municipality. You can obtain their contact information from other mayors and municipal staff that have pre-established relationships with them.*

Response 4: Establish Employment Policies / Procedures

Objective 4.1: Monitor the businesses in the area and ensure that employers are not dismissing Lebanese staff in order to solely hire Syrians, as well as paying fair wages.

→ *Municipal Action: While municipalities are not responsible for enforcing wages, they can help facilitate and negotiate with key business leaders. They can recommend that employers are providing employment opportunities for both the host community and Syrian refugees and have comparable wages.*

Objective 4.2: Ensure that all new shops and restaurants in area meet the legal requirements, whether related to opening restaurants or employing foreigners.

→ *Municipal Action: The municipality can regularly inspect new businesses to ensure they have all necessary paperwork completed. As needed, they can possibly negotiate how informal businesses can partner with existing businesses to create a wider benefit to both parties.*

Response 5: Engage Host Community in Municipal Response

Objective 5.1: Recruit municipal volunteers to help with the municipality's response and services.

→ *Municipal Action: Young people, both men and women, are prime candidates for these positions. They may want to gain additional leadership experience and exposure, or simply want to serve their community to improve the conditions, so working closely with the municipality on a volunteer basis would provide them with that opportunity.*

Objective 5.2: Engage the host community in Syrian refugee response by creating opportunities for them to help the municipality, which reduces community tensions and helps create communication channels between the host and refugee community.

→ *Municipal Action: Host community members can participate in distributions or organise small recreational events. It can help bring people together to cooperate, while building people-to-people connections, and ultimately generating stronger trust between groups.*



COORDINATION & PLANNING

Response 6: Preparedness and Forward Thinking

Objective 6.1: Municipalities can consistently and immediately plan for newcomers by being prepared to register refugees, collecting their personal information, knowing where they settle in their municipality, and maintaining consistent communication with them. The municipality is advised to have a system in place for refugee response and focal persons responsible for each task.

→ *Municipal Action: When newcomers arrive, have them register in the municipality. Record their basic information and provide registrants with a registration verification form with the contact information of the municipality and municipal focal person(s) responsible for refugee affairs. This will help keep the municipality records updated and establish stronger lines of communication with the refugee community.*

Objective 6.2: Municipalities are advised to plan ahead for certain factors and events that will result in increased needs and services such as seasonal changes, specifically winter kits, clothing and food vouchers, shelter, etc.

→ *Municipal Action: Before the winter and summer, many municipalities worked alongside NGOs to prepare and secure kits for their communities. Municipalities coordinated and facilitated the distribution of these kits and many times either advocated to obtain more for the host community and refugees that did not meet certain criteria standards or the municipality reached out to other organisations to complement the services of other NGOs. Based on these municipality requests, NGOs can inform donors about this need for host community support.*

Response 7: Maintaining Updated Refugee Database & Understanding Pressing Needs

Objective 7.1: Consistent communication with refugee community allows for the municipality to maintain the latest statistical information on families that enter/exit the municipality.

→ *Municipal Action:* Municipalities are advised to try to establish strong communication with the refugee community in order to stay abreast of events. This can help in preparation and response. For example, many times Syrian refugees in Lebanon know when additional families (either friends or relatives) plan to arrive to the municipality. Thus, the refugee community informs the municipality when they should be expecting newcomers, which allows for the municipality to plan ahead for their arrival by securing shelter, clothing, food/hygiene/winter kits, etc. They can also inform NGOs, who can also pre-plan. In addition, they may arrange to have municipal volunteers, staff, and/or municipal focal person(s) waiting to coordinate services upon their arrival.

Objective 7.2: In order to understand the latest needs of the refugee community, municipalities are advised to regularly assess and update their database by remaining in constant communication with refugee families, having a strong presence of the municipality on the ground, and consistently documenting the changing needs of the refugee families in particular, and the community in general.

→ *Municipal Action:* Municipalities can conduct home visits and speak with men and women about their needs, as well as visit collective shelters and labour lines to understand the growing concerns of families. They can visit schools to understand the

needs of children and youth. Municipal staff and volunteers are advised to consistently engage with all sectors of the Syrian refugee community (men, women, children, adults, senior citizens) to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the needs, so they can articulate this need to NGOs to consider in their planning and response. However, it is strongly advised that municipalities take into account sensitive cultural considerations when conducting visits.

Objective 7.3: A municipality-level refugee database is helpful and instrumental to the work of international and national NGOs conducting assessments and seeking information about particular areas, or where they should implement specific services. This will also be beneficial for the municipality in responding to the needs of the refugee community and understanding the changing demographics in the community. Thus, when municipalities have this information readily prepared and easily available, it will make it easier for organisations to collaborate with the municipality and for the municipality to respond to growing needs.

→ *Municipal Action:* A database can be created using a simple spreadsheet. If the municipality does not have sufficient computer skills or access to computers, NGOs may be able to provide training on how to create and maintain the database. In addition, this can be a great way for municipalities to engage volunteers in the community to help with this work.



Response 8: Coordination with Organisations

Objective 8.1: Request that organisations consult with municipalities about the planning and implementation of services and projects in order to prevent duplication and mitigate tensions between the host and refugee community.

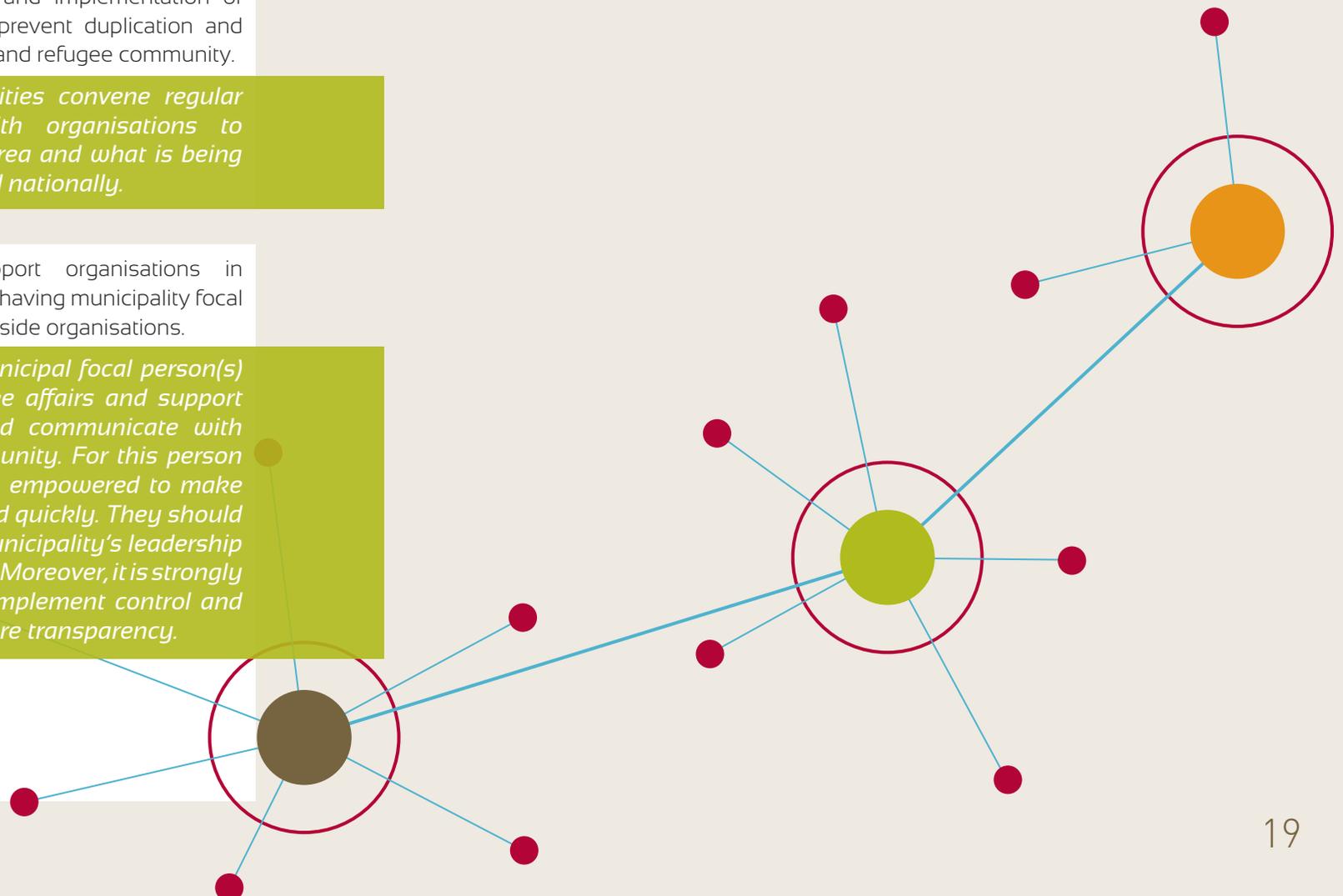
→ *Municipal Action: Municipalities convene regular informational meetings with organisations to learn about services in the area and what is being implemented both locally and nationally.*

Objective 8.2: Direct and support organisations in implementing their services through having municipality focal person(s) and volunteers work alongside organisations.

→ *Municipal Action: Assign municipal focal person(s) to manage all Syrian refugee affairs and support staff to help coordinate and communicate with organisations and the community. For this person to be effective, they must be empowered to make decisions so they can respond quickly. They should have regular access to the municipality's leadership to consult them on key issues. Moreover, it is strongly advised that municipalities implement control and monitoring measures to ensure transparency.*

Objective 8.3: Implementation of joint projects with organisations to ensure that the refugee community and host community responses are complementary to one another and meet the needs of both communities.

→ *Municipal Action: Identify locations and specific families that would benefit from emergency assistance. It requires that organisations apply the NGO vulnerability criteria to identify high-need families. It also requires municipalities be transparent and objective in the selection of households.*



Response 9: Communication to All Stakeholders

Objective 9.1: Municipalities are advised to make themselves accessible to the community and organisations.

→ *Municipal Action: For the community: Mayors and municipal staff can make themselves available to both the host and Syrian refugee communities. Both groups should indicate they are able to access the municipality's decision makers and express grievances and needs. This could be done through regular open-office hours where citizens can visit the municipality staff. It could also be done through frequent community events. Moreover, the municipality is advised to occasionally conduct home visits and a strong effort to contact the elderly, women, the ill and the handicap who may be unable to come to the municipality in order to learn about specific grievances unique to them. Strong communication will serve useful for managing tensions, enabling community events, and strengthening relations between the municipality and both the refugee and host populations.*

→ *Municipal Action: For NGOs: Organisations should be able to communicate with the municipality and contact them without difficulty in order to implement services and assess the needs of the community. Municipalities should be willing and able to provide support when organisations need assistance.*

Response 10: Communicate with Municipalities in Same Region

Objective 10.1: Mayors, vice-mayors and municipal focal person(s) are encouraged to make the time to meet with other municipalities in similar geographical areas and exchange ideas and discuss problems/solutions with other mayors and municipal staff. Meeting with other municipal staff from regional municipalities will also open up the possibility to collaborate on projects and/or refer organisations/services to one another for mutual support.

→ *Municipal Action: This can be done informally through established friendships with other regional Heads of Municipalities and municipal staff on a regular basis. Many of Heads of Municipalities take the time to meet with other mayors in the same region to learn about the latest humanitarian updates, including the UNHCR criterion (such as the 70/30 distribution criteria to host and refugee communities), public health concerns, organisations working in the area, etc.*

Municipal Example: The Head of Municipality X was experiencing difficulties making contact with NGOs and consequently his municipality received little assistance. Therefore, when he expressed this to Head of Municipality Y, he arranged a meeting with the municipal focal-person and Head of Municipality X, so that the focal-person may advise him on how to elicit assistance, as well as put him in contact with organisations working in the region.

Response 11: Promote Social Cohesion and Alleviating Tensions

Objective 11.1: Municipalities are advised to establish community councils of both host and refugee representatives to resolve community disputes.

→ *Municipal Action: Through the focal person(s), municipalities can identify representatives from the refugee and host community to informally resolve community disputes. These individuals are already regarded as important community figures and community members listen to their advice and respect their leadership. Municipalities are advised to maintain communication with them on a regular basis to resolve disputes and plan ahead to prevent increasing tensions and possible disputes.*

Objective 11.2: Municipalities are advised to play a role in dispute resolution through security services and officials.

→ *Municipal Action: When a dispute arises in the municipality that involves Syrian refugees and the host community, the security services bring the parties involved to the municipal building and contact the established councils to hear both sides and provide a fair resolution. The municipality helps facilitate this space to discuss disputes and the mayor is involved in the council, but plays a more hands-off role and allows the council to take the lead.*

Objective 11.3: Take measures to prevent tensions such as ensuring organisations provide fair distribution of services.

→ *Municipal Action: Recommend specific projects, including identifying the exact location and type of service, to NGOs to avoid tensions from the perception that refugees have more access to services. Municipalities should consider and become familiar with NGO's vulnerability criteria and assessment tools to inform the selection. Ensure municipalities and NGOs thoroughly discuss project implementation and its intended benefits to the host community and refugee population.*

Objective 11.4: Find Opportunities to promote social engagement and interaction between the host and refugee community.

→ *Municipal Action: Municipalities can encourage local community organisations, scouts, or sports teams to recruit youth from the refugee community to participate in recreational and sporting events.*

Municipal Example: Head of Municipality X encouraged the existing community soccer teams to recruit Syrian refugee youth so they may participate in regularly organised soccer tournaments. This has created more social activities for Syrian refugee youth, while also bridging relations between both communities.

Objective 11.5: Adjust current policies and procedures to accommodate current crisis.

→ *Municipal Action: Municipalities have been facing greater pressures due to the refugee crisis and their services and resources are strained. Therefore, municipalities have been lenient on their normal policies and procedures.*

Municipal Example: One of the primary challenges municipalities are facing is a shortage of shelter and housing accommodations. Thus, municipalities have been lenient on their permit distributions to promote the building of homes. This has been beneficial to the host community, as well as Syrian refugees by allowing the host community to benefit economically through renting their real estate, while also opening more living spaces for Syrian refugees in need of shelter.

RESOURCE MOBILISATION

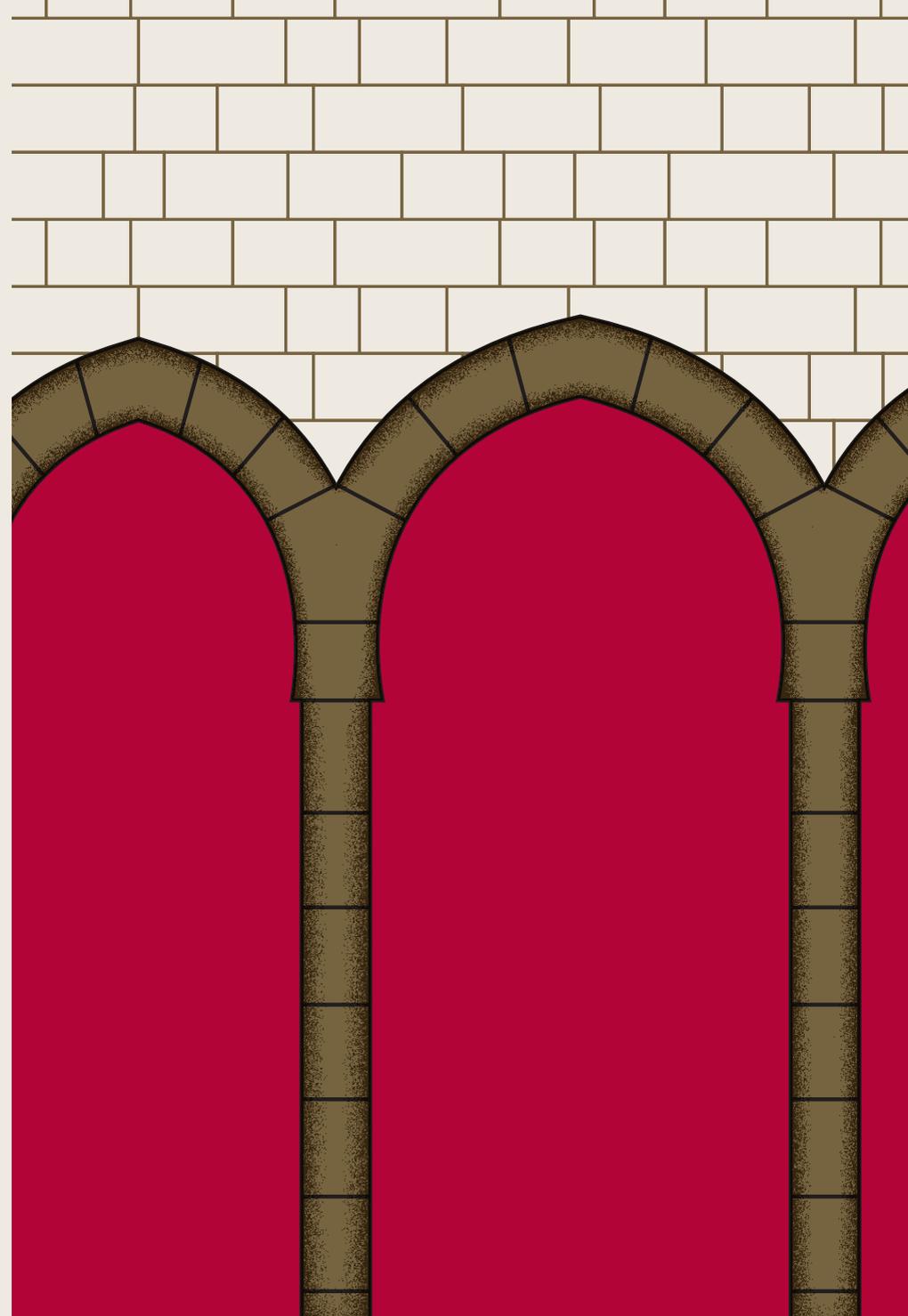
Response 12: Allow Organisations to use Municipal Spaces to Implement Work

Objective 12.1: Municipalities will allow for organisations to temporarily use public/private space(s) in their municipal buildings, or in the municipality, to work or implement services.

→ *Municipal Action: Offering organisations the municipalities' space for coordination, aid distributions, or as space to hold focus group discussions for assessments, for example, will help build the relationship between organisations and the municipality and facilitate further collaboration. If municipalities do not have physical space within their municipalities, they can also facilitate the use of other public/private spaces in the municipality.*

Objective 12.2: Strengthen communication, transparency, and visibility.

→ *Municipal Action: Permitting organisations to work in municipal buildings alongside municipal staff allows for consistent communication with organisations. Furthermore, it allows organisations to learn more about the municipality's challenges and daily activities and builds trust, which can pave the way for additional opportunities. Allowing organisations to conduct work from the municipality will also improve and increase the municipality's visibility because refugee and host communities will see the municipality playing an active role in responding to the refugee crisis, as well as organisations and municipalities working hand in hand to improve services and conditions.*



Conclusion

As the Syria refugee crisis continues on its third year and municipal resources continue to be exhausted and depleted, it is important for Heads of Municipalities to become even more creative in their response by focusing on the resources and capacities that are currently accessible to them. While lack of financial resources is an overwhelming need, there are effective strategies that Heads of Municipalities can still adopt to improve their response to rising issues in their communities. This guide has successful strategies of only the twelve municipalities that participated in the project. However, we are sure there are numerous strategies that are being implemented by other municipalities that are not mentioned here. We encourage Heads of Municipalities to convene with other Heads of Municipalities to exchange and share information and resources to support one another in the refugee response. In addition, it is important that linkage to central and regional level governments is made, such as the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, Special Cell for Syrian Refugees, respective Kaamakams and Muhafiz, and Internal Security Forces where applicable. Collaboration among all parties will allow for improved communication and coordination, as well as allow for possible points of partnership among municipalities and unions from the same regions.

At the end of this guide, there is a municipal workplan to help Heads of Municipalities and municipal focal person(s) establish a strategy for how to better respond to the refugee crisis by adopting some of the enclosed techniques. We encourage Heads of Municipalities to discuss with municipal employees how they can incorporate and implement these strategies in their day to day activities to effectively respond to the Syria refugee crisis to alleviate the suffering for both Syrian refugees and the host community.

Special thanks to the participating municipalities for their contribution to this municipality guide:

North (Assoun, Bikasfreen, Deir el Nbouh, Mrah al Sraj)

Bekaa (Baalbeck, Doures, Makna, Tybeh)

South (Bazourayeh, Bidyes, Bourj el Shamale, Ein Baal)



British Embassy
Beirut



MercyCorps