Habitat International Coalition’s Housing and Land Rights Network organized the second phase of the series of workshops of the “Sanctuary in the City: Beirut” project in cooperation and coordination with the Lebanese Amel Association from 13 to 15 December 2016. This phase consisted of two workshops: one for civil society organizations working on issues related to refugees and displaced persons in Greater Beirut, and one for members of the refugee community. A third workshop, which was scheduled for the staff and officials of the municipalities within Greater Beirut, did not take place. Instead, the HIC-HLRN/Amel team conducted a meeting with the mayor of Burj al-Barajneh municipality to discuss the project and the coming series of workshops.

On the first day, the workshop for civil society organizations covered an introduction to universal human rights, in general, and their application in the urban context within the international law framework. Then the succeeding sessions presented the purposes and objectives of the three principal international charters (the Global Charter for the Right to the City, the Gwangju Principles for Human Rights Cities and the UCLG-CSIPD Charter Agenda on Human Rights in the City), their common elements and distinct approaches. That was followed by the experiences and initiatives in three other cities and a session on the local legal and political framework affecting refugees and displaced persons in Greater Beirut. Finally, small group discussions addressed (1) living conditions and livelihood issues, and (2) social cohesion within the responsibility of civil society organizations in support of the principles and purposes of the right to the city/human rights governance in Beirut as a model for other cities in the Middle East and North Africa.

**CSO workshop:**

In their workshop, civil society participants recounted several challenges that hinder the attainment of adequate and decent standard of living for refugee communities in Lebanon, the most important of which is the lack of freedom to engage in professional opportunities and employment, and the consequent high cost of living and housing rents. They considered the most important social challenges were (1) sectarian approach of municipal councils, (2) a lack of efficiency and capacity of both refugees and municipal employees to communicate between them, (3) the inability to adapt/apply university degrees, (4) lack of access to medical treatment, in addition to (5) the pressure on refugees/displaced persons from the authorities...
and political groups, which affect the performance of municipalities toward the conditions of refugees/displaced, (6) legal challenges to obtaining a residence permit, in addition to (7) the absence of an electoral policy to ensure the election of municipal council members with sufficient experience and competence.

**Diagnosis of needs:**

The workshop for civil society organizations raised several points about the most important priorities of the livelihood of the refugee community and the role of municipalities in the provision of services and ways of living adequate for them in the Greater Beirut, including to address the following needs to:

- Develop a strategy for a census to count the number of refugees/displaced persons, in order to assess the needs and priorities that should be available to them;
- Respect the principles of international human rights Covenant and Conventions in the development of plans and strategies for dealing with refugees/displaced persons;
- Raise awareness among municipalities about how to handle the refugees/displaced persons, with the need to communicate directly with the refugees on the ground, whether through civil society or the municipalities and people with experience and competence in dealing with livelihood issues of refugees/displaced persons;
- Appoint a special delegate in all municipalities with efficiency and professionalism to assume the function of communicating with refugees and monitoring requirements, and demonstrate the municipality's ability to absorb and ensure livelihoods consistent with available municipal resources;
- Develop and implement regulations/ordinances regulating the affairs of refugees in the municipalities, including the issuance of a specific induction card to refugees, indicating residence in each municipality for the duration of time hosted in Lebanon;
- A fair and transparent approach to funding projects for refugees/displaced persons develop and distribute benefits fairly and equitably;
- Better coordination and communication between the parties concerned, both among civil society organizations themselves, or between them and the municipalities;
- Need for the establishment of councils or participatory social and cultural meetings to assist refugees and non-Lebanese to integrate;
- Strengthen the financial and human resources in municipalities, without cronyism and sectarianism;
- Promote greater cooperation with international organizations both civil society organizations and municipalities within the framework of transparent cooperation.

**Specific Proposals:**

- Allow for gainful work, as the highest priority for refugees and essential for satisfying other livelihood needs and achieving psycho-social well-being (Syrian migrant workers traditionally have done many of the construction jobs in Lebanon; however, it is vital to formalize work already done, in order to enter them into tax regime and social security system);
• Standardize rights and responsibilities for all refugee/displaced communities (e.g., Syrians can own property, while Palestinian refugees cannot);
• Refugees could form companies, cooperatives to start enterprises (e.g., IT services);
• Exploit available opportunities where municipalities could arbitrate/mediate with private sector and/or property owners to convert empty buildings to refugee/displaced person housing or enterprises for refugees/displaced persons to operate.

**Refugee/displaced persons workshop:**

The second day was devoted to a workshop for a group of Syrian refugee women (and one Palestinian refugee displaced from Syria). The group was composed mostly of students. The program introduced them to the principles and purposes of the city charters, a review of their contents and to what extent they could be applied to such a charter in Greater Beirut. The following small group discussions identified the key challenges and difficulties they face in achieving adequate livelihoods and social cohesion/integration in the municipalities where they live. For them, the most important priority was an opportunity to get a job and get business cards, in order to escape the harassment and other negative practices of the security men, both belonging to the Ministry of Interior or to municipalities.

It was clear also that the refugee participants as a whole also a lack guidance on how to connect with the municipal staff to organize their affairs and to provide them with basic services. At the end of the workshop, the participants reviewed the survey questions contained in the questionnaire on the economic and social situation of refugees, and diagnosed the challenges and difficulties that they face in addition to identifying the most important strategies to overcome those challenges, whether related to the provision of adequate standard of living, or pertaining to ways of integration and social cohesion.

The third day was scheduled for a workshop with municipal employees, but did not take place. Instead, the team conducted field visits with groups of refugees in two social centers in the Chiyah and Hay al-Silam neighborhoods. The team presented the project and the basic principles of the right to the city/human rights in the city/human rights cities. Two of the groups of youths filled the questionnaires with the project team, overcoming the obstacles that potential respondents face in accessing the internet to participate in the survey.

On the next morning, the team met with the Mayor `Atif Hasan Mansour of Burj al-Barajneh Municipality, to introduce the principles of right to the city/human rights in the city/human rights city and the objectives of the project in addressing the role of municipalities on the front line of the crisis situation of refugees/displaced persons, while providing them with services adequate living and managing their integration into society. He agreed to the proposal that Burj al-Barajneh Municipality host the next workshop for municipality staff and officials, including other municipalities, to publicize the project and its objectives, and begin drafting a declaration of Beirut as a human rights city.