

Check against delivery

UNHCR Executive Committee

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Statement by Machiel Salomons

Officer in Charge, Policy Development and Evaluation Service

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to present the report on activities of the UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service. I wish to draw your attention to document number A/AC.96/1128 on this subject.

The Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) is tasked with the examination and assessment of UNHCR policies, programmes and practices, and with the promotion of high quality research on issues relating to the activities of UNHCR. Its work focuses on operational and thematic priorities defined by the Executive Office and the Executive Committee. Today I wish to highlight a few of the recent and ongoing projects of PDES, which cover various aspects of UNHCR's mandate and mission to promote protection, assistance and durable solutions for refugees.

The evaluation of UNHCR's emergency operations has long been an important component of the work of PDES. Today UNHCR's largest emergency operation is in response to the ongoing crisis in Syria, and PDES recently led a real-time evaluation of UNHCR's operations in Jordan, Lebanon, and northern Iraq. The evaluation, undertaken by a team of UNHCR and NGO representatives, is the latest contribution by PDES to a maturing body of lessons learned from UNHCR emergency operations. In the past year, PDES also completed a review of the agency's responses to the Libya crisis, the Somali refugee influx in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, and the Sudanese refugee emergency in South Sudan. These generated valuable insights and PDES continues to contribute to the consolidation of lessons stemming from evaluations of our emergency operations.

In the realm of policy development, PDES has continued to devote attention to the issue of protection and solutions for refugees living in urban areas. During the reporting period, PDES has spearheaded two key initiatives on urban refugees, in partnership with the Division of Programme Support and Management. The first has been to convene and co-chair an Urban Refugees Steering Group to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the UNHCR urban refugee policy. The second has been the establishment of the Good Practices for Urban Refugees website, an interactive online platform which facilitates the sharing of information by practitioners working with displaced people in urban settings. PDES also undertook a global survey of UNHCR's urban refugee operations to gauge the extent to which the urban

refugee policy has been put into practice. The survey provided vital baseline data and identified a range of good practices as well as challenges in assistance to urban refugees.

In the past year, PDES has undertaken a range of projects focusing on people with special protection needs. This has included a review of UNHCR's engagement with displaced youth, a group which represents a large proportion of persons of concern to the agency. PDES is currently overseeing a project which examines the motivations and profile of unaccompanied Afghan minors on the move. PDES also supported a joint project with the Berkeley University Human Rights Centre to evaluate safe shelter arrangements for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Mental health and psychosocial support were the focus of two PDES reviews in the past year. The first was an evaluation of UNHCR's engagement with activities to support the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of persons of concern, which made several recommendations to strengthen the agency's role in this realm. The second was a review of the mental health support provided to UNHCR staff, contributing to a growing volume of literature on the wellbeing of humanitarian workers.

On the theme of durable solutions, UNHCR completed a series of joint evaluations with the World Food Programme on the impact of food aid in protracted refugee situations and its role in the promotion of refugee self-reliance and durable solutions. PDES also conducted a review of UNHCR's role in assisted voluntary return programmes, which highlighted the potential for an enhanced role for UNHCR in such programmes alongside IOM and other actors. PDES recently published a review of the strategic use of resettlement, and is currently undertaking an analysis of labour market outcomes for resettled refugees.

Finally, I wish to draw your attention to a current project being undertaken by PDES on UNHCR's policy and practice in relation to the assumption of responsibility for refugee status determination by States. The current undertaking is a preliminary assessment which will form the basis for a more comprehensive study to be conducted in the coming year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the years since it was established, the Policy Development and Evaluation Service has come to be widely respected for its contributions in the realm of refugee and humanitarian policy and practice. It has provided vital and clear-eyed analysis on a range of issues of key strategic relevance to UNHCR. It pioneered the development of real-time evaluations of emergency response operations, which are now widely-used across the humanitarian sector. PDES has fostered strong and productive links with institutions committed to evaluation, learning and accountability, including the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, as well as a range of academic institutions concerned with issues of forced migration and humanitarian affairs. Importantly, the Service has made a significant contribution towards the goal, noted in the UNHCR Evaluation Policy, of "fostering a transparent, inquisitive and self-critical organisational culture within UNHCR".

Looking to the future, PDES will seek to build upon these achievements in striving to strengthen the evaluation and analysis of UNHCR's activities. The task of ensuring the systematic assessment of the work of such a large and predominantly field-based organisation as UNHCR, with its unique mandate of promoting refugee protection and solutions, remains a challenging one. PDES continues to consider ways in which the rigour and utility of programme evaluations can be strengthened in coordination with the monitoring and oversight functions of the organisation. Ensuring predictable and effective mechanisms for the systematic follow-up of recommendations is also a priority. We look forward to engaging in a dialogue with the Executive Committee in relation to the future direction of the Service.

In meeting these challenges, PDES will continue to be guided by the principles of transparency, independence, consultation, relevance and integrity, seeking ultimately to support UNHCR in the effective pursuit of its mandate.