

# High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2017: "Towards a global compact on refugees"

12 & 13 December 2017

## Thematic session 4: Contemporary protection challenges

### Summary

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This session provided an opportunity to refine suggestions for the programme of action on a number of overarching protection issues. These protection challenges themselves are not new. Rather, the challenge is to address them in a new way that will ensure better access to protection, identification of needs and approaches to solutions.

#### **Some general considerations included the following:**

1. "Protection" means mitigating and responding to the risks of violence, exploitation, deprivation and abuse, as well as upholding the rights of all. It is at the core of refugee responses and requires both mainstreamed and targeted action.
2. It is important not to adopt a "categorization" approach to addressing specific needs, or to fall into the trap of seeking to identify which groups are the "most vulnerable"; holistic and intersectional approaches work best.
3. At the same time, prioritization of those who are least protected, including women at risk, children and the disabled, was urged.
4. Decisive measures to address the root causes of displacement built on cooperation, including by regional and municipal stakeholders as well as development actors, were called for. Several participants also urged more collaboration between UN agencies.

#### **Climate change and disaster displacement**

- Climate change, disasters and large movements of refugees can be interlinked. Measures to address displacement and mobility resulting from these phenomena are thus not only relevant for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, but also for the global compact on refugees.
- Indeed, protracted environmental crises such as the drought in East Africa are a new reality that is driving mass movements of people. This is to be taken into account in the programme of action.
- Participants made a number of concrete suggestions that could be included in the programme of action: enhancing data collection on the nature and numbers of persons displaced by climate change and disasters; encouraging States that have adopted wider regional refugee definitions to apply them to disaster displaced persons as relevant, or to make use of complementary and subsidiary protection; and applying the CRRF approach to finding durable solutions for disaster displaced persons, especially in the context of support for return.
- The programme of action could promote the inclusion of disaster displacement in national disaster risk reduction strategies and climate change adaptation strategies. New approaches to planned relocation could also be considered.
- The programme of action could further promote partnerships, building on the model of the Platform on Disaster Displacement. References in the programme of action to other instruments such as the Sendai Declaration were encouraged; and the vital role of regional fora was highlighted.

## **Refugee representation and inclusion**

- There was consensus that inclusion of refugees in programme design and implementation is crucial; the challenge is to ensure this takes place in practice.
- It is important also to recognize that refugee communities are diverse, and to ensure that all sectors are reached, including women and youth.
- Local-level planning is key; however, there is a distinction between local approaches per se and the inclusion of refugees themselves.

## **Accountability**

- Participants considered what could be meant by “accountability” in the context of the global compact on refugees and what accountability mechanisms could be adopted. This may require further exploration, but increased participation of refugees was seen as key to these efforts.
- Access to justice for refugees was also emphasized, including in the context of reception centres.
- Several participants urged measures of success, milestones and indicators, as well as regular reporting to be included in the programme of action.

## **Child protection**

- The number of unaccompanied and separated children is dramatically increasing, and support for more efficient protection systems to understand and address their needs is required.
- Child protection through education is a key priority, including in emergency and protracted situations. Mechanisms to ensure ongoing access to education in emergencies were highlighted (e.g. self-learning materials, safety and security training, catch-up classes).
- The inclusion of adolescent girls and boys in efforts to achieve development goals, including through access to livelihoods and skills training, was encouraged.
- Respect for family unity and family reunification are some of the most effective ways to ensure child protection. An international family tracing platform was one proposal put forward.
- Participants also referred to measures to end immigration detention of children; they emphasized that detention is never in the best interests of the child. The programme of action could build on good practices in terms of alternatives to detention.

## **The role of women and girls**

- UNHCR was encouraged to share best practices in advancing women and girls in its own operations, and to increase training for staff in this regard.
- Equal access to leadership opportunities for women and girls was encouraged.
- Participants suggested some concrete programming tools to ensure gender sensitivity: the “gender, diversity and age marker” included in European Commission projects and also mentioned by Germany could be a model.
- Measures to support maternal health care, including through mobile clinics, could be included in the programme of action; and awareness-raising programmes on the need to report pregnancies and to ensure birth registration could be encouraged.

## **Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**

- While a specific and significant issue for women and girls, SGBV also affects men and boys.
- Projects to strengthen the coping mechanisms of survivors, including through access to livelihoods, could be included in the programme of action.

- The “call to action platform”, currently led by the European Commission, which focuses on prevention and response to SGBV at field level, could be a useful tool.
- Participants also urged that references to child protection and addressing SGBV in the programme of action be linked to existing mechanisms and guidelines, such as those of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

#### **Statelessness**

- Statelessness is both a cause and consequence of displacement; if it is addressed, potential refugee movements and a multiplicity of protection challenges can be avoided.
- The importance of accession to the statelessness conventions was highlighted, and the removal of gender discrimination in nationality laws was also encouraged.
- Access to civil registration, documentation, and birth registration were emphasized as important protection tools.
- Standard operating procedures to better identify stateless people in the registration and reception phase could be included in the programme of action.

#### **Data**

- Efforts to improve data collection (particularly age- and gender-disaggregated data) were welcomed.
- Caution was expressed, however, regarding protection risks inherent in data-sharing; it is important to comply with data protection standards.

#### **Internally displaced persons**

- Several participants suggested that references to internally displaced people be included in the programme of action, particularly in light of the connections between internal displacement and refugee movements.
- Reference to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement was particularly encouraged; countries of origin could be supported to include the guiding principles in national laws and policies.

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*UNHCR*  
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