

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

12 & 13 December 2017

## Thematic session 2: Meeting needs and supporting communities

### Summary

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Thematic session two reflected upon how the global compact on refugees can meet the needs of refugees and, at the same time, support the countries and communities that host them.

All speakers and participants approached the discussion from the same starting point, namely the **common humanity** of refugees and members of host communities. They recognized that refugees have hopes and dreams, and wish to be empowered to support themselves, their families and their communities.

In that spirit, participants discussed the implementation of programmes that respond to the needs and aspirations of, and that invest in, refugees and host communities. Key elements of this discussion included the advantages of area-based approaches, as well as the importance of dialogue with host communities, including between refugees and hosts. The need to take into account the environmental impact that large numbers of refugees can have on the areas in which they are hosted was also underscored.

A key way in which the international community can support refugees and hosts simultaneously is through assistance that fosters the **inclusion of refugees in local and national systems, services and development planning processes**.

- The systematic inclusion of refugees was described as one of the CRRF's most important innovations, but participants also pointed out that inclusion has been occurring in a number of countries for many years.
- When systems and services are improved, refugee inclusion leads to better outcomes for refugees and host communities. Such efforts also result in efficiency gains, because they often remove the need to create parallel systems.
- When discussing refugee inclusion, participants focused on two systems in particular: those for education and for livelihoods.
  - In relation to **education**, there was general agreement that displacement does not alter the fundamental need for education, and that a lack of access to education can have serious consequences for displaced populations.
    - Participants discussed the importance of removing legal, administrative and practical barriers to learning so that refugee children can continue their personal development, and so that refugee youth and adults can develop the skills which enable them to be self-sufficient while in exile and which open up the possibility of sustainable return.
    - Including refugees in national education systems is not easy, however. Participants highlighted the need to hire and train more teachers and administrators, to improve educational infrastructure, and to ensure that curricula are adapted to the needs of refugees.
    - Hosting States, therefore, need the support of the international community to ensure that refugees are included in national education systems.
  - In relation to **livelihoods**, the discussion focused on the ways in which economic opportunities can benefit refugees and their host countries and communities.
    - Economic opportunities can reduce the dependence of refugees on other forms of assistance, boost the hosting economy in the right circumstances, and lay the groundwork for sustainable return when conditions allow by ensuring that refugees have the skills and resources that they will need.

- There were a number of interventions about the support that the international community can provide for livelihood creation, including supporting freedom of movement and work rights for refugees, as well as the development of skills that are linked to markets.
- True economic opportunities for refugees, however, require economic growth. Jobs for refugees will not be created if the economy is not growing, and there was discussion about the role that the international community can play in fostering economic growth in refugee-hosting countries, including through concessional trade arrangements, the de-risking of investment, and access to financial services, including microfinance.
- The private sector can also play a strong and sustainable role in driving economic growth, if the conditions incentivize their involvement. In this respect, a number of participants supported the proposal for the creation of a business platform in the programme of action, which would look at ways to maximize private sector involvement.
- Ultimately, however, it was also stressed that education and economic opportunities for refugees should support – rather than replace – the ultimate aim of achieving durable solutions.

More generally, the session heard of the benefits of **“whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approaches** to supporting refugees and host communities.

- This is not a job that can be left only to host States or UNHCR.
- A wide range of traditional and non-traditional partners can play a role in this respect, such as actors from across government (including local and city authorities), humanitarian and development actors, civil society (including local civil society organizations), the private sector, and the displaced populations and host communities themselves.

There was also discussion about the importance of **enhancing burden and responsibility sharing** in a manner that supports refugees and host communities.

- A key element of burden- and responsibility-sharing in this respect is the provision of more predictable support to hosting countries.
- There is a need to diversify the funding base to maximize the use that is made of bilateral, multilateral and private sources of funding. A number of participants also discussed the virtues of unearmarked, multi-year and flexible funding arrangements. The “grand bargain” was reaffirmed by a number of participants in this regard.
- It was also suggested that the programme of action could include a mechanism for the further exploration of financing options. Innovative financing mechanisms – such as bonds, insurance and de-risking mechanisms – hold significant promise in maximizing the efficiency and impact of existing resources, and improving the reliability and predictability of financial support. The programme of action could establish a process to consider these further.
- Burden- and responsibility-sharing is not just a question of money, however. It also involves investing in the capacity of those who host large numbers of refugees, including local authorities and civil society actors, and expanding access to third country solutions.

Finally, the session also discussed the imperative of **considering the needs and embracing the aspirations of refugees and their host communities**, including through tailored interventions that respond to age, gender and diversity considerations and the inclusion of refugees in planning, implementing and monitoring programmes that affect them.