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**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme**

Distr.: Restricted  
1 March 2017  
English  
Original: English and French

**Standing Committee**  
68<sup>th</sup> meeting

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**Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective**

*Summary*

Efforts to strengthen self-reliance and resilience are aimed at equipping and preparing persons of concern to the Office to respond to the protection risks they face and to take advantage of opportunities leading to durable solutions. This paper explores the linkages between self-reliance and resilience, and describes how they are relevant in the context of forced displacement.

It then sets out how UNHCR's work enhances protection and solutions by supporting self-reliance and resilience in three key areas: (1) strengthening the capacity of national services in the area of preparedness and emergency response, including contingency planning; (2) supporting national systems and local communities in responding to displacement once it occurs; and (3) helping equip the displaced for the future.

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## I. Introduction

1. The “2030 Agenda for sustainable development”, the 2016 “New York declaration for refugees and migrants” and other recent initiatives have recognized and reinforced the importance of State leadership and national systems in protecting human rights and in responding to “shocks”,<sup>1</sup> including large-scale forced displacement. International support for initiatives to enhance self-reliance and resilience can contribute to the capacity of States to advance protection-centred and comprehensive responses to forced displacement, as well as to the ability of people of concern to the Office to live independent and stable lives whether upon return to their home, or on integration in their countries of asylum or elsewhere.

2. Broadly, **self-reliance** refers to the ability of individuals, households or communities to meet their essential needs and enjoy their human rights in a sustainable manner and to live with dignity. Self-reliant persons of concern lead independent and productive lives and are better able to enjoy their rights, while also contributing to their host societies. **Resilience** refers to the ability of individuals, households, communities, national institutions and systems to prevent, absorb and recover from shocks, while continuing to function and adapt in a way that supports long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, and the attainment of human rights.

## II. Linking self-reliance and resilience

3. Linking self-reliance and resilience approaches, as well as efforts by humanitarian and development actors more broadly, can avoid the creation of parallel systems and ensure that all crucial individuals, communities, sectors and institutions are involved in planning, resourcing and implementation. The “2030 Agenda for sustainable development”, with its promise to “leave no one behind,” the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit, the New York declaration and other recent initiatives by the international community have consistently emphasized that displaced people and the communities that host them must be supported in an inclusive way and served through the same national systems. This requires predictable, comprehensive and complementary international support from humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and other actors.

4. Self-reliance is central to aid effectiveness and assists affected States in responding to forced displacement. Resilience interventions focus on enabling people and institutions to mitigate risks and respond to shocks, including those related to conflict, violence, natural disasters, health epidemics, and major shifts in labour markets. Both self-reliance and resilience build upon the resources and capacities of individuals, communities and States, with the objective of ensuring safe and productive futures for all those impacted by a crisis. Self-reliance can lead to resilience, while resilience is necessary to ensure that progress towards self-reliance is not eroded or reversed in the face of sudden-onset shocks and longer-term trends, such as climate change.

5. The concepts of self-reliance and resilience inform programmes and interventions by humanitarian and development actors to enable displaced communities to support themselves and strengthen the capacities of their host communities. However, as recognized in the commitments made by States in the New York declaration, the complex and often protracted

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a “shock” is described as “a sudden event with an important and often negative impact on the vulnerability of a system and its parts. Shocks represent significant negative (or positive) impacts on people’s means of living and on the functioning of a State”. The definition may be found in the glossary contained in the OECD “Guidelines for resilience systems analysis”, 2014. For practical application of the term “shock”, see for example, World Bank, “Forcibly displaced: toward a development approach supporting refugees, the internally displaced, and their hosts”, 2016.

nature of forced displacement today requires greater efforts to ensure that responses to new emergencies are designed with sustainability in mind, and to foster self-reliance and resilience from the outset. While the discourse on resilience has generally focused on natural disasters, resilience approaches could be expanded to better address social, political and economic consequences of forced displacement. While humanitarian action tends to be seen as contributing to the self-reliance of forcibly displaced people and development cooperation as building the resilience of host populations, bringing these concepts together has evident value.

### **III. Forced displacement contexts**

6. Building the self-reliance and resilience of the displaced equips and prepares them to take advantage of whatever durable solution will ultimately become available.<sup>2</sup> For returnees, efforts to enhance self-reliance and resilience in the country of origin can ensure that their return is sustainable. The New York declaration reiterated that the primary providers of protection and solutions are States, with host communities playing a crucial role. The international community's responsibility is to reinforce the response of national actors, when the scale of the needs surpasses local capacities and resources.

7. Faced with large-scale displacement, States will require support to strengthen and adjust national and local institutions to maintain levels of support and services, while at the same time upholding their international protection responsibilities. Self-reliance and resilience interventions can help strengthen the ability of governments and civil society to mobilize capacities and resources to improve protection of and solutions for displaced persons.

8. Preparedness before displacement occurs is crucial. From the beginning, the goal of response efforts in crisis-prone areas should be to support national systems, host communities and people of concern to anticipate, respond and adjust to shocks. When all actors are prepared to contribute to this goal before the onset of a displacement crisis, responses are more likely to be well-designed, coordinated and effective. Host communities can be supported to become more resilient through predictable and sustained support to local education and healthcare systems. Efforts to improve access to justice and other institutions essential to the rule of law, through collaboration with development actors, are also vital. In turn, increased self-reliance and resilience among the displaced and their host communities can contribute to the development of markets, lead to better services in remote areas, and support social cohesion.

9. The New York declaration recognizes the need for predictable and consistent support to States, host communities and members of civil society that lead responses to forced displacement situations and emphasizes that this support should be additional to existing overseas development assistance. The New York declaration highlights that efforts to build self-reliance and resilience lay the foundation for sustainable solutions and envisages both immediate and long-term international support.

### **IV. UNHCR's role in supporting self-reliance and resilience**

10. UNHCR support for self-reliance and resilience can take several forms, including: (1) strengthening the preparedness of national systems for emergency response, including contingency planning; (2) supporting national systems and local communities once

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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR's Executive Committee has recognized that promoting the self-reliance of refugees from the outset will enhance their protection and dignity, help them use their time in exile effectively and constructively, decrease dependency and enhance the sustainability of any future durable solutions. See Executive Committee conclusion no. 104 (LVI).

displacement occurs, in order to ensure the inclusion of displaced persons in national services, such as healthcare and education; and (3) supporting host communities to respond to the impact of forced displacement and helping people of concern equip themselves for future solutions.

### **A. Support to national systems in emergency response planning**

11. Working closely with national and international partners, and in line with the comprehensive refugee response framework, UNHCR is pursuing greater collaboration on emergency response with a wider range of national actors. The goal of this collaboration is to reinforce existing systems so that they are able to absorb increased numbers of people and address the specific needs of and risks faced by the displaced and their host communities. It is hoped that increased focus on contingency planning with States and local actors will contribute to more effective and predictable preparedness and resilience measures.

12. By way of example, in Colombia UNHCR supports the early warning and community defenders system established by the Ombudsman's office in areas at risk of forced displacement, in order to identify and respond to possible triggers. In Europe, the 2017 "Regional refugee and migrant response plan" complements the interventions of national and local authorities, proposing investments in areas where specific expertise is required or where the national humanitarian assistance capacity is overstretched.

13. Depending on the context, developing a comprehensive response to forced displacement may require investment in national institutions in the areas of justice, security, social services and economic development. With this in mind, UNHCR is increasingly working with States and development actors to identify the governance and institutional challenges faced by countries hosting large numbers of refugees or with large internally displaced populations, and is seeking to mobilize more predictable support and resources to address those needs. For instance in Lebanon, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is building on UNHCR initiatives in the early stages of the Syrian influx to support the capacity building of national police in areas with high concentrations of refugees.

### **B. Support to States and communities to respond to forced displacement**

14. UNHCR continues to shift towards intervention models that encourage and support local communities and national services to include and address the needs of the displaced, rather than establishing parallel humanitarian assistance programmes. As part of these efforts, UNHCR seeks to ensure the inclusion of people of concern in national and local development plans and resource allocation, while taking into account the impact on host communities, and encouraging increased international support. The aim of such approaches is to bolster self-reliance, avoid dependency, and better prepare people of concern for the future and for durable solutions, at home or elsewhere.

15. Through its global strategy for public health (2014-2018), UNHCR promotes the inclusion of refugees in national health care systems, including through investments in health infrastructure and "quality of care" initiatives that benefit both host communities and displaced populations, and which are designed to leave in place stronger services once the displaced find a durable solution. Through closer cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and international development actors in support of national development planning, UNHCR also helps ensure that the needs and capacities of displaced populations are included in analysis and priority setting. UNHCR is pursuing inclusive and more sustainable approaches to healthcare financing, such as ensuring inclusion of persons of concern in national health insurance schemes in Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries.

16. UNHCR's education strategy similarly prioritizes the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, while taking into consideration the specific concerns of the refugee communities. In Chad, from 2012 - 2014, the transition of Sudanese refugees into the Chadian national education system took place, with refugee teachers being trained to deliver the Chadian curricula in Arabic for Sudanese refugee children, ensuring that refugee teachers maintained their livelihoods and that Sudanese children were taught by teachers versed in their traditions. At the same time, Chadian children benefited from the increased number of qualified Arabic language teachers and from investments in the national educational system, which was key to Chad's own development.

17. In regions where natural resources are scarce, UNHCR's energy programming contributes to resilience and self-reliance. Within the framework of UNHCR's global strategy for safe access to fuel and energy (SAFE) (2014-2018), UNHCR has collaborated with the Jordanian authorities, the IKEA Foundation and the KfW Development Bank on the development of solar power plants to meet the energy needs of refugee households, schools, medical centres and humanitarian operations in Azraq and Zaatari camps. It was agreed that any excess electricity produced would supply the national grid. In Lebanon, UNHCR is supporting infrastructure development to improve water supply to urban areas hosting refugees.

18. In some contexts, UNHCR also strengthens resilience through interventions aimed at supporting local conflict resolution and community-based policing capacity, in response to changes in the security environment following a mass influx, and aimed at ensuring safety and security for both host and displaced communities. A joint programme is being developed with different parts of the Government of Ethiopia, UNDP, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other partners to address insecurity and inter-community violence in western Ethiopia. Such programming supports the inclusion of people of concern in community security structures that facilitate problem-solving and crime prevention efforts. They also bring together host and displaced communities and national authorities, contributing to social cohesion creating an enabling environment for refugees and host communities to achieve self-reliance.

19. UNHCR has invested in building and strengthening partnerships with development actors, such as the World Bank, in order to combine resources and expertise, and to develop joint research endeavours and evidence-based programmatic interventions. UNHCR welcomes the recent decisions taken by the World Bank to establish a global concessional financing facility and to allocate US\$ 2 billion worth of international development assistance (IDA) funding to refugee-host countries. This support will assist refugee-hosting countries to build local capacities and to strengthen national and local systems, allowing them to better address current needs and to create resilience to future shocks for both host and displaced populations.

### **C. Support to people of concern to equip themselves for the future**

20. UNHCR is strengthening relationships with organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank and regional partners to support changes at the local and national levels that will expand refugee access to labour markets. The "Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market", adopted by the ILO Governing Board in 2016, marked an important step towards establishing the foundation for improved self-reliance. Engagement with the private sector is a cornerstone of UNHCR's "Global strategy for livelihoods" (2014—2018), and UNHCR is supporting the development of inclusive value chains that connect refugees to global markets, including in the artisanal sector.

21. Facilitating access to financing and loan opportunities for members of displaced and host communities can enhance self-reliance and resilience. UNHCR is working with development partners to pilot a credit guarantee facility designed to encourage lending to refugees and to reduce risks for financial service providers. UNHCR also introduced minimum criteria for livelihood programming in nearly 100 operations, in order to ensure that interventions are market-oriented, results-driven and informed by local economic situations. UNHCR's collaboration with the ILO on market analyses is expanding, with joint work undertaken in a number of countries, such as Costa Rica, Egypt, South Africa and Zambia.

22. In order to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable populations in livelihoods efforts and to build their self-reliance, UNHCR promotes the "graduation approach",<sup>3</sup> which adopts a holistic approach to livelihood and protection interventions. Based upon the positive results achieved in pilot projects in Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Egypt, UNHCR is expanding implementation to other operations. The Government of Costa Rica is integrating the graduation approach in its national development plan, which will ensure sustainability.

23. UNHCR's long-standing legal aid and awareness-raising programmes underpin self-reliance and resilience efforts. The aim of these programmes is to help the displaced, as well as returnees and stateless populations, to understand their rights and how to access administrative and legal services using the appropriate procedures, in addition to supporting national institutions to include populations of concern in the provision of these services. For instance, in Myanmar UNHCR supported local actors to provide legal counselling and referrals to returnees to help them navigate the administrative processes for reclaiming and registering their land. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNHCR and its primary legal aid partner in the country work together to provide legal counselling and assistance to persons of concern, as well as training on key refugee rights issues for Government counterparts. Similarly, in Serbia, UNHCR works with the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights to provide free legal aid to refugees and asylum-seekers, and to support the capacity of State institutions through training on refugee protection.

## V. Conclusion

24. UNHCR will continue to analyse how resilience approaches can be adapted to meet the protection needs of the forcibly displaced, as well as how current self-reliance strategies can be strengthened and improved to be more effective and cost-efficient. UNHCR will work collaboratively with governments and a broad range of partners, including through multi-year multi-partner protection and solutions strategies, seeking to maximize technical expertise and capacities while ensuring good coordination and accountability. UNHCR's ability to foster self-reliance and resilience in the context of forced displacement and to enhance protection and solutions is, however, ultimately contingent upon the support of the international community – not just to the organization, but also to host governments, development actors and other relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>3</sup> Pioneered by BRAC and piloted by the World Bank's Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and the Ford Foundation, the graduation approach enables refugee and local families to progressively move out of extreme poverty and access sustainable livelihood opportunities.