

Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective (EC/68/SC/CRP.4)

Response to Member State Interventions

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Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

We were very encouraged by the many interventions by delegations that broadly supported UNHCR's consideration of the links between self-reliance and resilience from a protection and solutions perspective. Self-reliance is an area where UNHCR has considerable and growing expertise. As for resilience, as the Director of International Protection has acknowledged, we are not "leaders". In fact, we are learners.

We understand that resilient people, resilient communities and resilient institutions are better able to withstand both the shocks that cause forced displacement and the shocks caused by forced displacement – both for those who are uprooted and the communities that receive them.

We see both self-reliance and resilience as essential foundations for us to achieve a broader objective, which is sustainability. The goal of sustainability requires us to approach humanitarian and development planning in an integrated way and to move away from our short planning horizons and our focus on parallel humanitarian delivery systems.

Development professionals tell us that sustainability has four basic components: first, building the resilience of people, communities and institutions in the face of shocks; second, strengthening the self-reliance of people (or their ability act autonomously); third, linking people to national and local systems; and, fourth, ensuring that our actions to support one set of people are not done at the expense of another – in other words, we should "do no harm."

Let me develop that final point more precisely. We cannot act in a way that privileges refugees over host communities. A key feature of the World Bank's flagship report, *Forcibly Displaced*, is its balanced consideration of both displaced populations and host communities and its recognition of the interdependency between them. As the distinguished representative of the European Union highlighted in her intervention yesterday, our objective must be to create a "win-win" scenario for both displaced and their host communities.

Doing "no harm" means that we cannot ask national and local systems to absorb more responsibilities for more people with the same resources. This is the essential logic of the World Bank's special allocation of USD 2 billion through IDA 2018 for refugees and host communities. But these additional resources should be invested wisely to remove very specific obstacles to sustainability.

A second key concern came through in the Member State interventions yesterday. This was that our focus resilience and self-reliance should not distract us from the goal of achieving durable solutions, including through voluntary repatriation. Several delegations highlighted that resilience and self-reliance interventions, while welcome, should be seen as "temporary" in nature. UNHCR would agree that self-reliance and resilience are not alternatives to durable solutions or simply a "code word" for local integration.

We nevertheless believe that resilience and self-reliance prepare the way forward toward durable solutions. Self-reliant refugees are able to live independently and with dignity. They can contribute to their communities and the local economy today. Self-reliant refugees are also more ready to seize opportunities for solutions when they arise in the future. Our experience is that refugees who are self-reliant – who have developed skills, built up livelihoods assets and who have retained their independence and self-confidence – will be among the first to go home when this becomes possible. They will also be better equipped to return in a sustainable manner.

UNHCR also sees investments in resilience as an important preparedness measure. In *Forcibly Displaced*, the World Bank highlighted that refugee movements typically peak more than four years after the outbreak of conflict. We also know that history repeats itself in some major refugee situations, such as the flow of South Sudanese to Uganda and Burundians to Tanzania. These facts – while deeply discouraging on one level – also suggest that we have the opportunity to be proactive and to plan ahead and prepare – not only for humanitarian response but through development actions that increase the resilience of host communities and national and local systems.

Linking humanitarian action to development responses and building resilience – with additional resources – holds the potential for host communities not only to overcome shocks but to gain longer term benefits from strengthened institutions, services, infrastructure and economic conditions.

Let me also respond to the distinguished delegate of the United States, who asked what UNHCR would like to see from Member States.

- First, we are looking for a better alignment and articulation of humanitarian and development assistance.
- Second, specifically, we would want refugees and the challenges host countries face as a result of forced displacement – or where there is a risk of forced displacement – recognized as a development challenge requiring support.
- Third, we would want to see development support for national social protection and service delivery systems apply a forced displacement “lens” and respond in a comprehensive and area-based manner to the needs of all people living in the community, including refugees.
- Fourth, and finally, we would recognize and support the call of the host governments for additional funding and not asking them to spread the same limited resources across a larger population that includes refugees.

We see the New York Declaration, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the forthcoming Global Compact for Refugees as an opportunity for all of us to coalesce around these objectives.

In closing, I would like to note that UNHCR has a keen interest – a “watching brief” really – in the broader resilience agenda. As the distinguished delegate of Germany observed, climate change, environmental degradation and disasters resulting from natural hazards can cause displacement. They can bring communities into competition and conflict over scarce resources, exacerbate underlying social and political tensions and lead to displacement, including refugee flows.

We look forward to continuing our dialogue with the Committee as UNHCR develops its thinking and approaches to resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.