

## High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges

**Theme: *Children on the move***

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

8-9 December 2016

### SUMMARY

#### Thematic session 1 - Pursuing regional approaches to protect children on the move

##### Co-Chairs:

- **H.E. Ambassador Rosemary McCarney**  
Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations Office at Geneva
- **Mr. George Okoth-Obbo**  
Assistant High Commissioner (Operations), UNHCR

##### Background

As mentioned by participants in the opening plenary of the Dialogue, conflicts are no longer confined to individual countries and the movements of refugees and asylum-seekers are not limited to moving between the country of origin and the country of asylum. There is a clear need to consider regional responses when it comes to providing protection and solutions for children on the move.

Prevention and response activities as well as protection services need to incorporate national, bilateral, regional and cross-regional elements to provide effective protection to children on the move.

##### **Key recommendation 1: Addressing root causes so children do not need to move**

To protect children on the move, a better understanding of why they move and what pushes them, their families and their communities to seek safety and survival by crossing borders is required. Children themselves can provide these answers if they are listened to.

States committed to addressing the root causes of large movements of refugees and migrants in the New York Declaration. This includes increased efforts aimed at the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict, the promotion of human rights and greater coordination of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.

Many children are fleeing violence in some form, whether armed conflict, gang violence or individual persecution. Children move because of a lack of rights, including the right to access protection, education, health care, and safe and decent livelihoods. They move because of discrimination, xenophobia and racism. Children will continue to move until they feel that they belong. Children who are more vulnerable because of their sexual orientation and gender identity or disability face greater risks.

##### **Key recommendation 2: Responding to the protection needs of children on the move requires flexibility and cooperation among countries of arrival, transit and destination**

Participants agreed that States and service providers need to better respond to the needs of children on the move across displacement contexts, at the stage of arrival in the country of first asylum, in transit countries and in countries of destination. This requires not only

cooperation and collaboration between various sectors such as border, asylum and child protection authorities at the national level but also regional and cross-regional cooperation.

Participants discussed the work carried out to strengthen national protection systems and services in order for States to meet their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure the non-discriminatory access to all children under their jurisdiction. In this regard, participants identified areas where more needed to be done, including to:

- Assess which types of issues and activities foster regional coordination;
- Develop new initiatives based on regional approaches and cooperation to supplement national protection systems and respond to the needs of highly mobile children.

Such cooperation can take many forms, including:

- joint coordination groups;
- cross-border standard operating procedures;
- cross-border referral of cases;
- information sharing (taking into account confidentiality and data protection);
- joint monitoring visits;
- sharing of good practices with respect to alternatives to detention, including in support of UNHCR's Global Strategy – Beyond Detention;
- the use of regional courts and other quasi-judicial bodies to support States in their protection of children's rights;
- the regional collaboration between Ombudspersons and Human Rights Commissions was also mentioned, and in particular, the role they can play with respect to children on the move;
- the search for pathways to solutions that are in children's best interests, including regional cooperation on family tracing and reunification;
- regional policies and agreements, including regional protection frameworks and regional cooperation for the protection of children, including unaccompanied and separated children and children who are victims of trafficking.

Participants also noted that border procedures need to be implemented in a child-sensitive manner in which the best interests of children are a primary consideration. There was also discussion about the portability of rights across regions and the importance of ensuring that children on the move have access to education and health services wherever they are.

### **Key recommendation 3: Adopting regional approaches to advocate the rights of children on the move through stronger messaging**

Participants communicated a sense of urgency and duty to advocate on behalf of children on the move. Following the adoption of New York Declaration, momentum needs to be maintaining in order to ensure that the protection of children on the move remains central to the development of the two global compacts on refugees and migrants respectively.

Participants agreed that there is also a need to change the way children on the move are viewed by States and host communities. Working with children on the move to combat discrimination and xenophobia is key crucial in this regard. A Youth Delegate noted the work that refugees themselves do to support refugee youth integration in Asia and the Pacific. The examples they provided should be supported as good practices and replicated. Finally, children and their families need to be consulted and involved in advocacy, including when carried out on their behalf, to ensure that it raises issues of relevance to them.

**END**