

**Self-Reliance and Inclusion**

**(EC/71/SC/CRP.12)**

**Remarks by the Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions,**

**Mr. Sajjad Malik**

**Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (78<sup>th</sup> meeting)**

*Geneva, 8 July 2020*

*Thank you, Madam Chairperson.*

*Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to provide the Standing Committee with this update on UNHCR's efforts to support self-reliance and inclusion. Ensuring displaced populations have access to food, water and sanitation, housing, and health care remain as critical as ever during emergencies. The recently released Global Trends statistics – almost 80 million people forcibly displaced – remind us that these life-saving interventions remain as vital as ever. Equally, restoring dignity and normality to the lives of forcibly displaced persons is central to UNHCR's protection objectives. To that end, the emphasis placed on self-reliance and inclusion by the Global Compact on Refugees marked an important step forward in our collective practice. Moreover, the realization that host communities and local economies must also receive support to enable overall socio-economic progress signals an equally important change in our approach. I will be pleased to provide you with some encouraging examples of what has been achieved to date.

The sudden shock of COVID 19 is, however, a sharp reminder of how quickly gains can be reversed. As we are witnessing, its consequences are particularly dramatic for poor populations living in marginalized conditions. They will likely be felt for years to come. And, as much as we must first address the immediate public health emergency caused by the pandemic, we must also focus our attention on how

we can support socio-economic recovery over the medium term. Building self-reliance and including refugees and other displaced populations in those efforts are now even more relevant.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In terms of progress, we have seen encouraging examples of refugee inclusion in **national health plans**. **In many countries** refugees have been included in the national health care systems on a par with nationals. Progress has also been made with respect to the inclusion of refugees in **national education systems**. Participants will recall that several of the over 200 education pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum here in Geneva last December related to the inclusion of refugees in national education systems.

We have also seen progress towards enhancing **access to financing** for the displaced and host community members. This is a critical enabler for supporting self-reliance, one of the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. We have seen governments, UNHCR's partners, and the private sector joining hands in facilitating access to affordable financial services, opening bank accounts, access to loans and credit.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed **global policies** that create an enabling environment to better advance self-reliance. Policies on access to work have been adopted at country level. In Ethiopia, the implementation of the progressive 2019 Refugee Proclamation has allowed refugees' access to work permits, primary education, drivers' licenses, and legal registration of life events such as births and marriages.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The **progress towards self-reliance and inclusion is unfortunately being threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic**. Refugees and other persons of concern find their ability to earn a basic living and ensure food security threatened.

To gather information on **the impact of COVID-19** on household welfare, UNHCR, in collaboration with the World Bank, the UNHCR-WB Joint Data Centre and National Bureau of Statistics is implementing a series of comparable COVID 19 socio-economic surveys compiled including in Kenya and Uganda, for refugees, stateless, and nationals. We are also collaborating in the MENA region using existing data to perform much needed socio-economic analysis. Initial results from Kenya reveals that compared to nationals, refugees are less likely to be employed, are more likely to go to bed hungry, have much lower education attainment and they have significantly less access to health services. Lack of education, especially attendance and completion of secondary school, is also a risk for refugees.

Millions of refugees have **asked for urgent financial assistance** to cover their daily basic needs. Many of them were self-reliant, living in urban areas. They are now unable to meet their basic needs, not able to pay rents, thus the threat of evictions and the use of negative coping mechanisms.

In Africa and the Middle East, over 350,000 refugees have asked for urgent financial assistance to cover their daily essential needs. Across Eastern Horn Africa, the pandemic comes on the top of existing emergency conditions in the region with 60% of refugees experiencing food ration cuts<sup>1</sup>. In Rwanda, most of the 12,000 urban refugees reported they have lost their jobs. In March, average monthly wages of surveyed Jordanian and Syrian workers were reduced by more than 40% and in Turkey a protection survey revealed that over half of respondents had lost their jobs<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, due to underfunding and the effects of the locust invasion.

<sup>2</sup> 1,500 refugees in 20 provinces were surveyed.

The impact of the pandemic on **refugee women** has been particularly profound. Almost all who had been working have indicated that their sources of income had been disrupted. Estimates also suggest that half of secondary-age girls may not return to school after the pandemic.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Despite this dire situation, we have also been encouraged by **emerging good practices**.

UNHCR has been working alongside partners to **enhance inclusion and access of refugees to entrepreneurship opportunities and related services and programmes**. During these past months, we have seen first-hand that refugees, IDPs, asylum-seekers and stateless people have stepped up and contributed to local economies, labour forces, and the frontline healthcare response. They are using their skills to produce masks, PPEs and other sanitary equipment for their communities. They want to help.

Across the world, **cash assistance** to refugees and IDPs has been scaled up. In collaboration with governments and partners, over 65 UNHCR operations have expanded existing cash assistance or launched new cash interventions very early on in response to COVID-19 pandemic, reaching more than a million of the most vulnerable. Linking to the extent possible to the national social safety nets, cash assistance is an effective means to provide an immediate response and to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis. For example, in close collaboration with the Government of Pakistan, UNHCR launched a large-scale emergency cash grant distribution, targeting over 36,000 vulnerable refugee households. The programme is aligned with the Government's Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme that targets 1.2 million vulnerable Pakistani households and aims to alleviate the socio-economic impacts of COVID. The cash grants<sup>3</sup> are delivered country-wide through the Pakistan Post Office's digital Urgent Order Money service that has been made accessible to refugees.

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<sup>3</sup> Of USD 75.

UNHCR is also working with governments and partners in different contexts to ensure that refugees continue to receive **social protection benefits** during COVID crisis, including in Brazil, Costa Rica and South Africa.

UNHCR is further strengthening its existing collaboration with host Governments, the World Bank Group, and other multilateral and bilateral development actors, with a view to facilitate the inclusion of refugees in their planning and programming. For example, the **World Bank Group is launching a programme of 114 projects globally in response to COVID-19<sup>4</sup>. More specifically, it is making available US\$ 1 billion in grant form to eligible countries from its IDA19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees (HRW) during the next fiscal year<sup>5</sup>. The objective is to make financing more attractive for refugee-hosting states, thereby ensuring refugees and host communities will continue to be included in efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Additionally, the **African Development Bank will fund a recently approved USD 20.5 million COVID-19 response project covering the Sahel region<sup>6</sup>. The project will support the primary health response and resilience of vulnerable communities, including refugees and IDPs.****

In order to **mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic on refugee education**, UNHCR is working with governments and other partners on distance-learning and digital programmes, building on existing partnerships with the private sector.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Three central themes have emerged in UNHCR's response to self-reliance and inclusion. **Firstly**, significant progress has been made to-date and we have seen promising examples from across the world. **Secondly**, due to COVID-19, this progress is at risk and we have witnessed some regression in the

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<sup>4</sup> 89 projects are now active and 25 in preparation.

<sup>5</sup> Starting 1 July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> In Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

advances made so far. **Thirdly**, despite the risks we have seen good practices emerge in the way we are responding to the pandemic and how we can still address the challenges of self-reliance and inclusion for Persons of Concern, working in close cooperation with communities, host governments and our many partners.

To conclude, I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support to UNHCR's work to strengthen the resilience and to reduce the vulnerability of the people we serve. During these unprecedented times, the importance of solidarity and responsibility sharing are needed now more than ever.

**Thank you.**