

**80th meeting of the Standing Committee
23-25 March 2021**

**Agenda item 6 (b)
Oral update on the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges**

The twelfth High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which took place between October and December 2020 in a series of five virtual sessions, focused on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the protection and resilience of displaced and stateless people and host communities. Over 1,500 people participated in the Dialogue, representing a diverse range of stakeholders, including States, intergovernmental organizations, humanitarian and development actors, refugees, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academics. Participants reflected upon how to address the pressing challenges of protection and solutions that emerged during the pandemic, building upon the international refugee protection regime, as well as the principles and arrangements set out in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). They also highlighted actions that States and other actors have taken in response to COVID-19, which could shape international protection in future pandemics.

Many States and other actors have developed innovative approaches to ensure the protection of displaced and stateless people, and to address the effects of the pandemic in the immediate, medium and longer term. The Dialogue identified such promising practices and highlighted lessons learned from the COVID-19 response with a view to promoting protection, resilience and access to services for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless people and host communities.

The Dialogue was composed of five virtual sessions:

1. Opening session (21 October 2020)

The principle of the meaningful participation of refugees in global processes, which was a key component of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019 and subsequent discussions, guided the format of the opening session. In a discussion with the High Commissioner, five refugees and an advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals shared good practices from their work on the front lines of the pandemic and emphasized the importance of drawing on the skills and knowledge of refugees and stateless people in times of crisis. Furthermore, the speakers briefly introduced some of the topics that were to be explored in more detail in the subsequent virtual sessions.

2. Protection challenges and responses to COVID-19 for and by forcibly displaced and stateless people (4 November 2020)

This session focused on key protection challenges that have emerged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and explored effective ways to address them, including through efforts led by refugees and IDPs. The panel, which was moderated by the Co-Chair of UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council, was comprised of five speakers – a representative of a State party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a civil society representative, two refugees and an IDP. Panellists discussed concrete actions that could be taken to strengthen protection and improve the enjoyment of rights in crisis situations through, for example, ensuring continued access to asylum procedures and documentation. They further highlighted protection risks associated with age, gender and diversity characteristics which were exacerbated in the context of the pandemic, such as the rise in gender-based violence, disruptions in education and an increase in racism and xenophobia.

3. Resilience and inclusion in health – emergency and longer-term approaches with reference to COVID-19 (18 November 2020)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set forth ambitious goals to promote healthy lives and wellbeing. Many States face challenges in meeting the healthcare needs of populations on their territory in the context of the pandemic and urgently need financial and technical support. The session opened with a panel discussion on the inclusion of refugees in national health systems and the support required for strengthening such systems from the perspectives of national and local governments, refugees and development actors. This was followed by a moderated discussion on good practices, lessons learned and challenges in relation to the inclusion and integration of refugees and other displaced people in national health systems and responses in the context of COVID-19.

4. COVID-19 and climate change – what can we learn? (2 December 2020)

This session examined lessons learned from the COVID-19 situation that could help address the climate emergency. Issues related to the protection of people displaced in the context of disasters and climate change were a focus of discussion. It was underlined that refugees, IDPs and host communities had thus far received limited support to tackle the climate crisis, despite their increased vulnerability to worsening climate conditions. Participants observed that the COVID-19 situation had highlighted the need to learn from affected communities

and to take urgent action based on scientific evidence so as to anticipate, mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. Representatives from affected communities shared their experiences and recommendations for addressing the climate emergency, while researchers and practitioners focusing on climate change spoke on policy changes that were necessary to accelerate climate action.

5. Closing session - preparing for protection and solutions in the future (9 December 2020)

The closing session focused on the ways in which the international community could better ensure protection and solutions for displaced and stateless people in future global emergencies. The discussions drew upon the GCR and the good practices that had emerged; the lessons learned and recommendations from the preceding virtual sessions; and the outcomes of the 2020 annual consultations with NGOs. The session opened with a dynamic discussion among States and other stakeholders who made recommendations in relation to issues of protection, inclusion and preparedness for climate action. This was followed by a short video featuring the youth winners of the 2020 [Model United Nations Refugee Challenge](#) and their recommendations for resolutions that could support the response to the pandemic. The session concluded with a moderated conversation between the High Commissioner, the European Commissioner for International Partnerships and the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, reflecting on the key themes of the Dialogue and how the international community could prepare for protecting and ensuring solutions for displaced and stateless people moving forward.

Key recommendations

The High Commissioner highlighted some of the key recommendations from the Dialogue, including:

- Ensuring access to asylum, while protecting public health.
- Adapting asylum and statelessness determination processes, including for the issuance of documentation.
- Monitoring and promoting inclusive national responses, including with regard to vaccination campaigns, to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Ensuring that national health systems in host countries receive adequate financial and technical support in an equitable manner to advance the inclusion of refugees, particularly in the most vulnerable communities.
- Encouraging partners, such as private sector actors and the country coordination mechanisms of the Global Fund, to increase their engagement with humanitarian actors as well as refugees who are best placed to determine the needs of their communities.
- Maintaining inclusive efforts towards increasing the empowerment and self-reliance of refugees through access to education and employment.
- Enhancing engagement with refugee-led organizations, including through providing spaces for engagement, capacity building, guidance and support and ensuring the participation of refugees in discussions.
- Preventing the spread of misinformation and strengthening community-based structures for more effective communication with refugee and other displaced communities.
- Adapting existing tools to protect vulnerable people from exclusion and rising inequalities.
- Taking urgent action to prepare and respond to the climate emergency, including through mitigating, and where possible, preventing displacement before it occurs; providing training and education to enable affected communities to protect, preserve and rehabilitate their environment; and engaging women as leaders in climate action and adopting a gender transformative approach.

The outcome document, the summaries of the virtual sessions and other information is available on the Dialogue's webpage [here](#).

UNHCR, 5 March 2021