

PROPOSALS FOR AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CONCLUSION  
ON SELF-RELIANCE

A. Current position based on previous ExCom Conclusions

1. Even though no ExCom Conclusion has been solely devoted to the theme of self-reliance, its importance in the context of refugee protection has been acknowledged in numerous Conclusions. These Conclusions have recognized that:

- the enhancement of economic and social rights, including gainful employment, is essential for the achievement of self-reliance and family security;<sup>1</sup>
- self-reliance of adult family members enhances their capacity to support dependent family members;<sup>2</sup>
- self-reliance is vital to the process of re-establishing and enhancing dignity;<sup>3</sup>
- refugee employment should be facilitated by States and obstacles to such should be identified and removed;<sup>4</sup>
- the recognition of academic, professional and vocational certificates is encouraged;<sup>5</sup>
- self-reliance enhances the sustainability of any of the durable solutions and relieves the burden on first countries of asylum;<sup>6</sup> and
- burden and responsibility sharing through the provision of financial and in-kind support for refugee populations and host communities is important.<sup>7</sup>

2. In Conclusion No. 104 (LVI – 2005) on Local Integration, the Executive Committee also recognized “...that promoting the self-reliance of refugees from the outset will contribute towards enhancing their protection and dignity, help refugees manage their time spent in exile effectively and constructively, decrease dependency and enhance the sustainability of any future durable solution.” Furthermore, the important part that self-reliance plays in the economic dimension of local integration was explicitly recognized in this Conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> ExCom Conclusion No. 50 (XXXIX – 1988) (j).

<sup>2</sup> ExCom Conclusion No. 88 (L – 1999)(v).

<sup>3</sup> ExCom Conclusions No. 50 (XXXIX – 1988) (j), and No. 104 (LVI – 2005).

<sup>4</sup> ExCom Conclusion No. 50 (XXXIX – 1988) (k).

<sup>5</sup> ExCom Conclusion No. 101 (LV – 2004)

<sup>6</sup> ExCom Conclusion No. 100 (LV – 2004) (v).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

## B. The issue today and the relevance of an ExCom Conclusion

3. Self-reliance remains a critical protection issue, particularly in protracted refugee situations. As of September 2006, there were 31 protracted refugee situations in the world accounting for 5,243,000 refugees.<sup>8</sup> The continuing lack of durable solutions has led to dependency on humanitarian relief in most of these situations, with a few exceptions where the hosting States have allowed and facilitated refugees' ability to become self-reliant. As stated in the UNHCR Conference Room Paper "Protracted Refugee Situations" to the Standing Committee in June 2004, "Refugee self-reliance is the key element in any strategy dealing with the effects of prolonged and stagnant exile. It is more dignified for the individual, is less costly, and is a positive factor for repatriation."<sup>9</sup> Other recent UNHCR documents also acknowledge protection risks resulting from long-term dependency on humanitarian aid and stress the importance of self-reliance.<sup>10</sup> It is timely that the ExCom review this critical protection issue and provides strategic guidance.

4. Information gathered *inter alia* through UNHCR's participatory assessments, the roll-out of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Strategy (AGDM) and the gaps analyses conducted within the framework of the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (SPCP) clearly illustrate the link between lack of livelihood opportunities and protection risks, including vulnerability to various forms of exploitation and other threats to personal security. Refugee women in particular, face serious protection problems, including sexual and gender-based violence as well as domestic violence, susceptibility to trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, and liability to resort to "survival sex". Furthermore, child labour is all too frequently a normal part of the daily lives of displaced boys and girls as the economic means of parents and adult carers for survival are scant. Protection problems arising from a lack of self-reliance opportunities also have the potential to generate irregular secondary movements.<sup>11</sup>

5. Countries of asylum with poor socio-economic conditions, where the host community is struggling to meet its own needs, face serious obstacles in providing self reliance opportunities to refugees. The assistance of the international community including UNHCR, NGOs, financial and development agencies is important in terms of providing resources, expertise and financial support. At the same time, the host State could provide an enabling environment in which basic economic and social rights could be exercised, including access to local labour markets, and other facilities, such as education and training. ExCom could review the obstacles faced by host States and seek to address these so as to provide a way forward in these issues.

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<sup>8</sup> UNHCR characterizes protracted refugee situations as situations where the number of refugees of a certain origin within a particular country of asylum has been 25,000 or more for at least five consecutive years.

<sup>9</sup> "Protracted Refugee Situations", Conference Room Paper for the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee, EC/54/SC/CRP.14, 10 June 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Handbook for Self-Reliance; Global Consultations paper "Local Integration"; Agenda for Protection Goal 5, Objective 7; "Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern"; Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR); "Convention Plus: Targeting Development Assistance for Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement: Statement of Good Practice.

<sup>11</sup> Lack of self-reliance opportunities resulting from, *inter alia*, limitations on freedom of movement, was one of the protection-related motives for irregular movements identified by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) survey of irregular secondary movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers and State responses thereto. Convention Plus Core Group on Addressing Irregular Secondary Movements of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers, Joint Statement by the Co-Chairs, FORUM/2005/7, 8 November 2005; the Path of Somali Refugees into Exile: A Comparative Analysis of Secondary Movements and Policy Responses, Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies.

6. The Agenda for Protection devotes Goal 5 Objective 7 to the theme “achievement of self-reliance for refugees” and *inter alia* requests UNHCR and States to ensure that, from the outset, assistance programmes for refugees integrate strategies for self-reliance and empowerment. The formulation and implementation of these strategies require a leadership role by host States in partnership with the international community including UNHCR. It is important for ExCom to galvanize a renewed commitment by host States and the international community through a formal position taken in an ExCom Conclusion, which would also enable UNHCR to apply it as an important tool of protection.

### C. Outline for a possible Conclusion on self-reliance

7. In view of the above, an ExCom Conclusion on self-reliance could play a critical role in reaffirming the importance of self-reliance as a key element of quality protection and provide guidance on how to enable persons of concern to UNHCR to exercise their livelihood rights. A Conclusion could address the following issues:

- Reaffirm the importance of self-reliance as an element of quality protection and its contribution to making any of the durable solutions sustainable;
- Identify the protection risks, such as increased vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence and exploitation, facing both displaced and hosting communities as a result of long-term dependency on humanitarian assistance;
- Identify the key obstacles to self-reliance;
- Review modalities of livelihood and self-reliance strategies to overcome key obstacles;
- Provide guidance on the creation of an enabling environment in which both displaced persons and their hosting communities are empowered to exercise their livelihood rights and achieve self-reliance;
- Renew call for international solidarity and burden and responsibility sharing to enhance resources and to find solutions, including through development cooperation projects, using for example the Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) framework.

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