ICVA update March 2017

Global Compact on Refugees (GCR):

In March, ICVA was active in connecting its activities on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) with regional perspectives. In particular, ICVA contributed to the Technical Experts’ Meeting Towards Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees (Entebbe, 7-8 March) organized by Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). IGAD Member States, UNHCR and partners worked to prepare for the 25 March 2017 IGAD Special Summit on protection and durable solutions for Somali refugees and reintegration of returnees in Somalia. The Summit was an important landmark in the follow up to the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, including the CRRF. Through the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia, the IGAD Heads of State and Government declared they would “Collectively pursue a comprehensive regional approach to deliver durable solutions for Somali refugees, whilst maintaining protection and promoting self-reliance in the countries of asylum, with the support of the international community and consistent with international responsibility sharing as outlined in the New York Declaration’s Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)”. They also adopted “the accompanying Nairobi Comprehensive Plan of Action for Durable Solutions for Somali refugees which, together with this declaration, represents [their] commitment to deliver a comprehensive regional response”. Statements by many stakeholders are available online, including by the UNHCR Special Envoy on the Somali Refugee Situation, Amb. Mohamed Abdi Affey; by the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations), George Okoth-Obbo, on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; as well as a joint NGO Statement from the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), the Somalia NGO Consortium and the Inter-agency Working Group (IAWG).

ICVA also established constructive exchanges with ReDSS, joining its CRRF working group recently established to ensure coherence and consistent engagement at national and regional level. In turn, ReDSS was also invited to contribute to the meetings and exchanges ICVA coordinates with its members (e.g., through the ICVA Forced Displacement Working Group) and the wider NGO community. Such connections will ensure improved information sharing and coordination on the CRRF/GCR between the global level and an essential region where most CRRF case studies are currently located (the East and Horn of Africa).

On 13 March, UNHCR presented a non-paper on ‘Towards a Global Compact on Refugees: a Proposed Roadmap’ at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, also summarized through a one-pager. This document sets out the processes that UNHCR proposes to develop the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). In particular, it clarifies that UNHCR envisages the Global Compact on Refugees will comprise two complementary parts:

1. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, as agreed by Member States in Annex I to the New York Declaration, supplemented by preambular and concluding paragraphs;
2. A Programme of Action underpinning the Framework that sets out actions that can be taken—both by Member States and by other relevant stakeholders—to ensure its full implementation.

Moreover, the non-paper outlines that work towards the Global Compact on Refugees will include a number of interconnected lead-up activities, i.e.:

a. The application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework to specific countries or situations, including by drawing lessons from existing or past refugee situations;
b. Informal thematic discussions to identify the actions that are essential to the type of refugee response envisaged in the New York Declaration.

c. Stocktaking in late 2017 (including at the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December) to assess progress made, identify lessons learned, and lay the groundwork for the Global Compact on Refugees.

d. UNHCR will prepare a draft of the Global Compact on Refugees by February 2018 and formal consultation with Member States and other relevant stakeholders will commence. Following consultations, the Global Compact on Refugees will be presented in the High Commissioner’s 2018 Annual Report to the General Assembly.

e. [Diagram extracted from the UNHCR one-pager]

Overall, Member States reacted positively to the proposed roadmap although requesting UNHCR to provide clarifications and additional details such as on the specific modalities and content of the various lead-up activities as well as on the sequence of events. Member States broadly agreed that the process should be Geneva-based, where the expertise on refugee issues is strongest among the diplomatic community, although it would be important to keep their New York colleagues informed and engaged through regular briefings. Refugee hosting States particularly called for being meaningfully consulted, asked for more regional diversity in the application of the CRRF, including with case studies in industrialized countries, and reminded the importance of ensuring the GCR makes explicit references to the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing. UNHCR announced it will refine its roadmap taking into account inputs received. A further UNHCR briefing on the topic by UNHCR was planned to take place in New York on 6 April and then again in Geneva on 21 April.

NGOs also conveyed suggestions and questions to UNHCR on the roadmap, particularly geared towards ensuring civil society can meaningfully and predictably engage with the lead-up activities. Since 13 March, ICVA is also working with NGOs and UNHCR to ensure the June 2017 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations feeds into the process highlighted in the roadmap, given that the focus on “From global responsibility to local action – Implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)”.

Immediately following the briefing on the UNHCR proposed roadmap for the GCR, the 68th Session of the Standing Committee marked another important milestone, with the CRRF featuring prominently in the debates, including the NGO interventions. In a dedicated joint statement on the CRRF, NGOs recognized the “commendable efforts made by UNHCR in taking the New York Declaration and the CRRF forward”, while calling for clarifications on the “opportunities for NGO engagement at all levels – from the very local, to the global forums”, and urging “states to support UNHCR, NGOs and all stakeholders in the CRRF process”. NGOs are eager to work with UNHCR, States and other stakeholders for a successful application of the CRRF and development of a Refugee Compact that brings concrete improvements to the daily experience of refugees. Daniel Endres, UNHCR Director of Comprehensive Responses, provided an Oral Update summarizing the key developments in the host countries that have started to apply the CRRF. Mr Endres also announced that Ethiopia, Djibouti and Honduras had confirmed their intent to apply a comprehensive refugee response, thus joining Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Somalia on the list of CRRF case study countries. As part of UNHCR efforts to “catalyze and enable a broader base of engagement”, Mr Endres stressed the increasing role of international and
regional financial institutions such as the World Bank. He also referred to undertakings designed to strengthen civil society engagement, particularly the formation of an NGO-IFRC-UNHCR Reference Group on the CRRF. ICVA had called for the creation of such a group and worked with UNHCR and partners to help define the objectives and tasks it would fulfil. On 15 March, the Reference Group’s Terms of Reference were finalized and participants invited to join the first meeting in early April. The Reference Group will bring together UNHCR, IFRC as well as global and regional NGO consortia and networks, which role will be to channel inputs from their members and disseminate useful information on the process. The objectives of the Reference Group will be *inter alia* to actively contribute to improving comprehensive refugee responses; to measuring progress in the rolling out of the CRRF; to identifying lessons learned; to feeding into the consultations leading to the formulation of the GCR; and to the work on complementary advocacy. Some Member States, especially Switzerland and the United States, supported the further engagement of civil society and non-traditional actors and highlighted the importance of partnership and coordination for the success of the CRRF. Many expressed support for UNHCR efforts in the implementation of the CRRF, the action-oriented approach, while calling for more geographical balance and diversity. Major refugee hosting countries such as Algeria, Iran, and South Africa repeated their expectations that the GCR would usher in an era of increased responsibility-sharing rather than increased burden.

NGOs continued to be active with concrete projects, exchanging information and discussing approaches with ICVA on the margins of the UNHCR Standing Committee. On 22 March, a webinar on the Initiative on Child Rights in the Global Compacts was organized and facilitated by Terre des Hommes and Save the Children, providing an update on the Initiative and its work to date. Bringing together UN agencies, civil society, human rights institutions, donors, and the private sector, the initiative will create a constituency of actors that can support the translation of the commitments in the New York Declaration into action that genuinely protects children. The webinar will also feature the IOM’s Director of Migration Policy and Research Department, Michele Klein Solomon, providing an update on the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration’s process of development; and UNHCR’s Senior Policy Advisor, Ellen Hansen, outlining the progress to date on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Information on how to attend the Global Conference on Children on the Move (12-13 June 2017 in Berlin, Germany) was also made available.

Information on ICVA and NGO activities, articles and statements that relate to the CRRF and Global Compact on Refugees can be found on ICVA’s website. ICVA also welcomes any information that may be shared in order to foster a more collective approach to the CRRF and Global Compact on Refugees. To request and provide information, please contact Jerome.Elie@icvanetwork.org