NGO statement on the global compact on refugees and on preparations for the first Global Refugee Forum

Dear Chair,

This statement has been drafted through a wide consultation with NGOs and attempts to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

On 17 December, the UN General Assembly capped an intense 2-year process by overwhelmingly endorsing the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). The NGO community warmly welcomed this positive outcome and signaled its readiness to contribute to implementation.

The Compact was developed through an inclusive, multi-stakeholder series of discussions and consultations, necessarily leading to a compromise document but also to strong collective ownership of the Compact. Despite inherent concessions made by many, a common vision was outlined to address contemporary forced displacement challenges.

Collective ownership should continue now that we have entered the implementation phase. This is the beginning of a new process, where we need to continue working in partnership to give practical meaning to the various objectives and mechanisms of the Compact. Indeed, the responsibility-sharing arrangements outlined in the Compact are still rather vague. Yet, it is crucial that they deliver if the Compact is to have long-term impact. Therefore, the first Global Refugee Forum in December will surely be a crucial event.

NGOs have four core expectations for the Global Refugee Forum, which we recommend States and UNHCR to consider in their preparations:

1. First, it must deliver pledges that lead to concrete positive changes in the lives of refugees and host communities, within the scope of the Compact’s objectives and the time-frame between 2019 and 2023. This requires that pledging is done against specific challenges and gaps in existing refugee situations. Concretely, we suggest that in each major refugee host country, national stakeholders, including refugees and host communities, under the leadership of the host government, come together to define what policy changes, funding requirements, investment needs and third country solutions are needed to attain for example refugee self-reliance and integrated service delivery by 2023. National stakeholders would make their own pledges against those gaps and seek matching support and partnerships with international stakeholders at the Global Refugee Forum.

2. Our second expectation is that the 2019 Global Refugee Forum increases the preparedness capacity to respond to new refugee situations by generating more flexible and unearmarked funding and other surge-capacities.

3. Third, a credible system for monitoring and following-up of pledges must be established and endorsed by States at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

4. Fourth, a set of specific and ambitious indicators should be established to measure the progress on the Compact’s four objectives. Indeed, solid indicators are essential to ensure accountability. We
recommend establishing a set of targets and indicators that will allow multiple stakeholders to deliver against the Objectives – as is the case with the SDGs.

NGOs stand ready to support preparations of a Global Refugee Forum that delivers these results. We are looking to States and UNHCR to take the lead in designing multi-stakeholder preparations at country, regional and global level. We are eager to form alliances and develop complementary advocacy at all levels to ensure the Forum is impactful.

At country and regional level, NGOs are ready to inform national and regional arrangements and comprehensive plans that can generate outcomes of eased pressure on host communities, increased self-reliance, expanded third country solutions and relevant initiatives that can promote safe, dignified, and voluntary returns when and if situations allow. Some NGOs are equipped to facilitate effective participation of refugees and host communities in defining gaps and setting relevant pledging targets for the Global Refugee Forum. Lastly, NGOs are ready to make their own pledges in partnership with others. We believe that partnerships should be at the center of pledges made at the Forum because joint commitments can bring a multiplier effect and therefore contribute to the much-needed additionality that the Compact seeks to create. We welcome the recent documentation on pledges shared by UNHCR and look forward to further exchanges on the topic, with UNHCR and other stakeholders.

At global level, NGOs expect to be associated to the development of the pledging template and other groundwork. We welcome UNHCR’s decision to organize multi-stakeholder Preparatory Meetings for the Global Refugee Forum and look forward to participating. We reiterate our expectation that this conversation will also happen outside of Geneva. NGO and networks will do their part and are already strategizing and exchanging in many regions. NGOs also welcome the initiative of carving out substantial time within the 2019 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations to discuss the GCR implementation and planning for the Global Refugee Forum. We will work to ensure this represents a major and concrete landmark on the way to the Global Forum.

Although follow-up and review will not be the focus of the first Forum, the Compact calls for an important process of defining indicators. For GCR indicators to be effective, they need to be coupled with set targets in line with the SDG agenda and a periodical evaluation of GCR outcomes. The indicators should be based on a shared understanding of collective outcomes, which are mentioned in the GCR text but not yet defined. Without that shared understanding, collective outcomes will mean different things to different constituencies. Indicators and collective outcomes should be based on established refugee rights and draw on existing benchmarks for achieving solutions to displacement, including the Durable Solutions Indicator Library\(^1\) developed through a three-year inter-agency process under the leadership of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs as well as the International Recommendations for Refugee Statistics which were endorsed by States at the 49\(^{th}\) Session of the UN Statistical Commission\(^2\).\(^\) We also recommend States and UNHCR to take interest in and draw from NGO-led suggested indicators, including the Refugee Response Index\(^3\), the Self-Reliance Initiative\(^4\) and the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards\(^5\). Indeed, to maintain collective ownership, indicators should be agreed in a multi-stakeholder fashion through inclusive exchanges. NGOs are looking forward to further engaging in this discussion.

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\(^1\) [http://inform-durablesolutions-idp.org/indicators/](http://inform-durablesolutions-idp.org/indicators/)
\(^3\) [https://refugeeresponseindex.org](https://refugeeresponseindex.org)
\(^4\) [https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/about](https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/about)
\(^5\) [https://seepnetwork.org/MERS](https://seepnetwork.org/MERS)
Other elements of the Compact also need to be defined collectively, particularly the three-year resettlement strategy, the Support Platforms, and the Asylum Capacity Support Group. NGOs call on UNHCR and other stakeholders to open channels allowing for contributions into the various ‘workstreams’ that are emerging. For example, when Support Platforms are formed, it will be essential to ensure that they actively involve refugee and host communities in all their diversity, including community leaders, women’s groups, youth groups and people with disabilities in order to find solutions that meet the needs of all refugee and host community women, men, boys, and girls. It will also be important to ensure complementarity between the different elements of the Compact and to avoid creating parallel processes that take up significant time and resource investments.

Although the Compact does not sufficiently consider internally displaced persons, NGOs believe that many of its provisions are consistent with IDP responses and can be applied in those contexts. Moreover, NGOs support ongoing efforts to bring a global focus to the plight of IDPs through initiatives such as the GP20 Plan of Action. We also support the idea of a High-Level Panel on IDPs. We ask for progress in setting up the panel and call on States and UN Agencies to move forward on this issue.

Similarly, the Compact acknowledges that “climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements” and envisages the possibility of providing guidance on “measures to assist those forcibly displaced by natural disasters” (para 63). NGOs strongly encourage that efforts be made to develop such measures and stand ready to collectively strategize with States and other stakeholders in this process. The Compact can contribute to improving adaptation measures to climate change, including through mobility and protection mechanisms.

This also calls for ensuring complementarity between the two Compacts, especially if we are to better address the complex mixed migration realities and operational challenges still witnessed in different parts of the world today. We call on UNHCR to keep this in mind when developing the pledging template and on States to pay due regard to complementarity between the Compacts when developing their respective pledges.

Finally, let’s remember that the CRRF is an integral part of the Compact. As such, it should remain a major focus and be mainstreamed in refugee responses worldwide. Over the past two years, NGOs have actively contributed to the implementation of the Framework in Africa and Central America. We hope that the recent release of the Two-Year Progress Assessment6 will serve to inform the way forward in mainstreaming the CRRF approach. through the worldwide implementation of the GCR. It will also be essential to look at how the implementation of the Global Compact will be complemented by other processes, including the UN’s New Way of Working and the EU’s nexus approach, both of which have similar elements to the CRRF and GCR.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, NGOs consider the GCR as a major achievement that can help re-shape refugee responses. However, this will not happen overnight and will require sustained political commitment and engagement from all stakeholders. In particular, although pressed with time, we need to remain ambitious and demonstrate that the Global Refugee Forum is a mechanism that will make a difference for responsibility-sharing, refugees and host communities. In the spirit of the whole-of-society and collective ownership, NGOs are eager to cooperate with UNHCR, States and other actors to make the Global Compact on Refugees a game changer in refugee response.

Thank you.

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6 See: https://www.unhcr.org/research/evalreports/5c63ff144/year-progress-assessment-crrf-approach.html