

**NGO statement on the preparations for the first High-Level Officials Meeting**

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs. It has been prepared in close consultation with the NGO community, representing a diverse set of views.

We appreciate the opportunity for continued engagement in preparations for the High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), which will be the first opportunity to take stock of progress against the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) since its affirmation in December 2018. The HLOM will also be the first time GCR stakeholders gather again to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on GCR implementation.

We wish to thank UNHCR for its efforts to keep stakeholders informed on meeting preparations through its quarterly briefings, the circulation of key planning documents, such as the draft programme and the list of stocktaking events taking place in 2021, and the engagement of a variety of stakeholders at global and regional level, including refugee-led networks. As the HLOM draws closer, NGOs remain strongly committed to engaging actively with UNHCR and other stakeholders to ensure the meeting yields **concrete and sustainable outcomes** for refugees and their host communities.

Regarding the substantive priorities of the HLOM, we wish to make **three main recommendations**: first, to align the priorities and expected outcomes of the meeting with the objectives of the GCR; second, to anchor meeting discussions in monitoring and accountability, in line with the original purpose of the HLOM; and third, to develop a shared strategy for matching complementary pledges and accelerating their implementation.

**1. Align the priorities and expected outcomes of the meeting with the objectives of the GCR**

So far UNHCR has proposed three priorities for the meeting: 1) expanding support for refugees and host countries 2) advancing the implementation of the pledges made at the first GRF and 3) directing efforts to the areas in need of further support. Building on many of the interventions that were made in response to this proposal, NGOs recommend structuring the HLOM around the four original objectives of the Compact: i) ease pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand access to third-country solutions; and (iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. This change will not only ensure higher consistency between GRFs and HLOMs but also better contribute to the ultimate goal of the Compact, namely, a more equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing to better protect and assist refugees and support host countries and communities. NGOs believe the priorities identified by UNHCR at the April briefing should be integrated into these four pillars, rather than set a new direction for the post-GCR implementation process.

In terms of expected outcomes, NGOs would like more clarity on the overall vision for the HLOM and the required strategy to turn it into action. What we have seen so far is a wide variety of preparatory events, some of which have already taken place, without an apparent common thread. Learning from the first GRF's preparatory process, and the GRF itself, the HLOM must not become an end in itself

nor generate a myriad of uncoordinated initiatives without focus. NGOs are ready to contribute to a HLOM that is intentionally designed to deliver concrete improvements in the lives of refugees and their host communities. In this sense, we would like to receive more detailed information on what is expected post-HLOM, and how UNHCR envisages getting there in the next two years.

## **2. Anchor meeting discussions in monitoring and accountability**

The GCR states that HLOMs will allow for mid-term review of progress and facilitate regular stock-taking. NGOs would like to see this important function reflected in the core programme of the meeting. The current HLOM programme, however, only marginally takes stock of the progress made since GCR adoption, leaving most of the review to preliminary events, such as the launch of the GCR indicator report in mid-November. While NGOs welcome an early launch of the report, we believe the HLOM also should devote adequate time for a meaningful discussion on the report findings in line with its original purpose. Only with a full understanding of what has worked and what hasn't in implementing the GCR objectives can we hope to move towards a more forward-looking direction.

NGOs look forward to further updates from UNHCR on any preliminary findings from the GCR indicator reporting exercise.

## **3. Develop a shared strategy for matching complementary pledges and accelerating their implementation**

NGOs recognise the great efforts by UNHCR, Member States and other GCR stakeholders, alliances, and networks to advance the implementation of GRF pledges and we look forward to a comprehensive update on their progress. Many among us are also proactively leading on the implementation of several pledges. For example, the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) and 15 partner agencies presented a joint pledge to promote refugee self-reliance. This pledge includes commitments to: (1) expand the use and support for the [Self-Reliance Index](#) to measure self-reliance; (2) increase access to self-reliance programming and; (3) advocate to ensure an enabling environment conducive for self-reliance. The initiative continues to make significant progress towards the GRF pledge through the global roll-out of the Self-Reliance Index in 14 countries, increasing access to self-reliance programming for thousands of refugees and conducting and disseminating research that highlights the benefits of self-reliance.

Going forward, we would also like more information from UNHCR on the matching exercise they have undertaken in recent months to ensure policy pledges by refugee-hosting countries are supported by complementary financial pledges by donor governments. We ask for more transparency and clarity to better understand how civil society and other stakeholders can contribute to this crucial exercise.

With regard to facilitating inclusive engagement more generally, we welcome the convening of various regional events to support more geographically comprehensive input into preparations for the HLOM, through collaboration between UNHCR, NGOs, refugee and diaspora networks, and other stakeholders. The robust participation of refugees and host community representatives should be pursued in these fora, and their outcomes fed into the pledging process and capture of positive practices.

We also welcome the initiative taken by some States to convene consultations at country levels and strongly encourage the rapid expansion of this practice, for which we offer our support. We recall that a guiding principle of the GCR is that national ownership and leadership are key to its implementation.

In conclusion, NGOs reiterate their firm support for the first HLOM. We believe inclusive participation, collaboration, full implementation of existing pledges and robust accountability will be fundamental to its success.

Thank you.