NGO Joint Statement

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 to express NGOs’ perspectives and recommendations on achievements since the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF), and on the way forward.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), collectively agreed in December 2018, was a strong demonstration of commitment to solidarity and the international refugee protection regime. The Compact aimed to enhance predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing while embracing a multi-stakeholder partnership approach with refugees at the centre.

However, three years on, refugees’ plight is still receiving too little attention from donor, host, and origin countries, while the need to mobilize adequate resourcing for refugees remains greater than ever. In 2020 the UNHCR Global Trends Report highlighted that, despite COVID-19-related restrictions, displacement has only continued to grow, with 1 in 95 people (48% of whom are women and children) in the world now forcibly displaced, compared to 1 in 159 in 2010. Climate change, increased complexity and severity of displacement situations and the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have also endangered the livelihoods, health, wellbeing, and protection of displaced and stateless populations.

Despite these increasing challenges, the current international environment is fraught with contradictory trends, many bent on undermining – in its 70th anniversary year – the 1951 Refugee Convention. Externalization practices have increased since 2019, in direct contradiction to the Compact’s letter and spirit. We also continue to see a consistent funding gap in refugee response and the interests of host, donor, and origin States continue to often trump the direct interests of refugees, including the fulfilment of their rights.

In this context, it is vital to reaffirm the importance of the Compact and assess how it can most effectively contribute to future solutions. The High-level Officials Meeting is critical to take stock of GRF pledges, but also to reflect on the progress and challenges related to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees to date, looking at both the original intentions and outcomes.

NGOs have been actively engaged in the development of the Compact and its implementation from the outset. Two years ago, the first Global Refugee Forum generated some 1400 pledges demonstrating solidarity with host countries and communities, as well as articulating ambitions to improve the living conditions, access to rights and prospects for protection and durable solutions.

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1 UNHCR Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2020: https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/
2 This included pledges made in October 2019 at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. Since pledges can be submitted on a rolling basis, the number of pledges recorded on the Dashboard, as of 10 December 2021, had increased to 1599. See Global Compact on Refugees Digital Platform: https://globalcompactrefugees.org/channel/pledges-contributions
NGOs constituted the main group of pledging entities\(^3\), with over 300 pledges submitted individually or collectively, including in partnership with refugee-led organizations (RLO), faith-based organizations, States, private sector, and other stakeholders. Most pledges made by NGOs focused on Protection Capacity, Education, and Statelessness. Important pledges were notably made on preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV), ensuring age, gender, and diversity inclusion, supporting refugee education, meaningful participation of refugees, providing legal aid, enhancing self-reliance, and expanding access to durable solutions\(^4\).

1. **The impact of the Global Compact on Refugees, 3 years on**

While the international community’s initial commitment to responsibility-sharing is to be welcomed and encouraged, there has been little progress on turning this commitment from aspiration to reality.\(^5\) At this half-way point it is crucial to refocus efforts on tangible improvements in responsibility-sharing. A major element of the responsibility-sharing system created by the Compact was the Global Refugee Forum, although other tools and arrangements were also set in motion. At this important juncture, NGOs point to the need to:

- Reflect on the future of the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. Now that the initial three-year period has passed, we welcome ongoing consultations led by UNHCR in this respect. As we move forward, it is important to ensure that all three pillars of the Strategy are balanced and coherent, with complementary pathways truly additional to resettlement, rather than competing with it. Most importantly – as the number of refugees in need of resettlement has reached an all-time high, alongside forced displacement record numbers – we must redouble our efforts to achieve the stated vision of the Strategy: 3 million refugees accessing resettlement and complementary pathways by 2028. Anything less would be a failure to achieve the GCR’s stated goal of responsibility-sharing.

- Analyze the performance and inclusivity of the three Support Platforms, their value-added in addressing current dynamics such as the Afghanistan situation and the potential replication of this model in other contexts such as the Central African Republic situation.

- Consider the impact of the Asylum Capacity Support Group and how it can be used as a model for pledges matching.

It is important to assess whether sufficient space has been afforded to NGOs and civil society in these mechanisms. Our assessment is that, too often, NGOs’ involvement is not seen as a priority, is at best tokenistic and seats at the table must be fought for, in contradiction with the multi-stakeholder and partnership approach espoused by the Compact. To date, the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees remains only tangentially accessible for NGOs. Whilst there is a broad base of State support, NGOs are not meaningfully engaged in the Platform’s discussions, strategic vision, or implementation. Most NGOs – many of whom have significant operational responsibilities and provide support to millions of Afghans – are unaware of how to engage with the Platform or how to support its work.

Moreover, while saluting the GCR focus on supporting host countries facing protracted situations, more needs to be done to ensure that the GCR’s principles are operationalized into both ongoing and

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emerging refugee contexts. NGOs are concerned that the GCR is rarely applied in some protracted crises and that the original purpose of devising tools to help address new large-scale refugee movements might have been lost. For example, the GCR should be mobilized more effectively in responding to the Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen situations.

Finally, although calling for the active and meaningful participation of refugees the GCR has not generated any specific mechanism to support this urgent goal. Partnerships with refugee-led organizations remain particularly insufficient. Funding silos, shrinking space for civil society in many contexts, restrictions, and exclusionary decision-making structures limit the partnerships that would allow national and refugee-led NGOs in refugee-hosting countries to engage with their own host governments directly on questions of national refugee policy and practice, and to participate in global decisions that affect refugees and their hosts. Greater support for civil society and NGO engagement in refugee policy discussions and decisions is urgently needed at the national, regional, and global levels. A mechanism is also needed to channel adequate, flexible, multi-year, and sustained funding directly to refugee-led organizations.

2. Implementing GRF pledges: our mid-term review

Two years on from the first Global Refugee Forum, NGOs are continuing to implement their pledges. As of 10 December, the GRF Dashboard indicated that out of the total 1599 pledges, 598 were in progress, meaning that the implementation status is unknown for a majority of pledges. Observing the pace and scope of the implementation of pledges by other stakeholders, particularly Member States, NGOs stress the need to realize and increase commitments to additional financial support to host countries, particularly as a means of ensuring hosts can advance the rights and prospects of both refugees and host communities. As emphasized in NGO pledges on Age, Gender, and Diversity, we also need to look at whether pledges made match the needs of refugees, displaced and host communities so we ensure our efforts are leading to tangible protection outcomes. Few Member States have defined specific action on how their pledge will protect and empower marginalized groups of refugees. Support targeted at those groups was very low, with just over 30% of pledges mentioning particular action to tackle discrimination and specific risks faced based on age, gender, and diversity or contributing towards reducing inequalities. There is also a lack of disaggregated data to monitor progress for these specific groups. UNHCR’s GCR Indicator Report provides very limited gender-disaggregated data. However, NGO research finds that displaced women and girls lag behind on progress towards self-reliance for example.

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6 Of the nearly $30 billion USD that cycles through the humanitarian system annually, only about 0.05 percent goes to refugee-led organizations – less than $15 million annually and that is mostly short-term project-based funding, not supporting organizational strengthening. This figure is estimated using the 2019 Global Humanitarian Overview: https://www.unocha.org/publication/global-humanitarian-overview/global-humanitarian-overview-2019?gclid=EAIaIQobChMiXiN Xi_tik9AlVioxoCR2nuQcIEAYAYASAFgKGI_D_BwE
7 Global Compact on Refugees Digital Platform https://globalcompactrefugees.org/channel/pledges-contributions
8 InterAction Analysis of the Global Refugee Forum pledges, April 2021: https://www.interaction.org/blog/three-takeaways-from-interactions-analysis-on-grf-pledges/
Among pledges in progress, 177 were from civil society despite the multiple challenges faced because of the COVID-19 pandemic and budget limitations. The pandemic particularly highlighted the value of pledges made by local organizations and refugee-led organizations and the importance of supporting them given their critical role. NGOs would like to also emphasize some tremendous challenges faced during the pandemic as a result of travel restrictions, forced closure of critical services and technological gaps complicating on the ground support, and responses. In addition, the need for trauma support and social emotional learning for children, teachers, and family members has increased exponentially.

The pandemic has also created an additional and urgent need for support to ensure refugees are vaccinated against COVID-19, on an equal basis with their host communities. Refugees are facing a range of barriers to vaccine access\textsuperscript{12}, which must be overcome both to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to fulfill the Compact’s promise of expanding health systems to facilitate access by refugees and host communities, including access to adequate quantities of vaccines\textsuperscript{13}.

For the first time in history, an entire global generation of children have had their education lost, damaged, and disrupted. While the first Global Refugee Forum resulted in over 200\textsuperscript{14} pledges for education, the pandemic has impacted their implementation and has also highlighted a protection emergency. Despite the need, only a minority of pledges have a focus or a reference to child protection and to children in relation to durable solutions and livelihoods. With the abrupt loss of livelihoods and income due to the pandemic, the deterioration of living standards translated into increased vulnerability of children, highlighting the need for investment in protection. We strongly encourage more State action on child protection, including on preventing and responding to the specific risks and needs facing displaced girls\textsuperscript{15}, on policy reform, inclusion in national child protection systems and access to birth registration and for all pledge-makers to report regular updates.

Building on the foundation of refugee protection, access to documentation and legal protection is foundational to the achievement of the GCR, and critically for Objective 2 focused on enhancing refugee self-reliance\textsuperscript{16}. Regarding legal assistance and despite the disruption brought by the pandemic, many NGOs pivoted quickly to establish or scale up remote legal counselling sessions across various online platforms, and to set up and expand hotlines and similar services, to reach those in need of legal assistance. NGO legal aid providers continued to be the backbone of the legal assistance ecosystem in most contexts, providing countless hours of free specialized assistance for refugees and others forcibly displaced. In particular, RLOs and NGOs increasingly provide frontline legal support for their communities. NGOs also scaled up collaboration with private sector law firms, such as those involved in a joint private-public sector pledge made by the legal community at the GRF\textsuperscript{17}, and with broader access to justice efforts centered on Sustainable Development Goal 16. In Afghanistan, NGOs

\textsuperscript{12} See, e.g., Oxfam International, A People’s Vaccine For Refugees: Ensuring access to COVID-19 vaccines for refugees and other displaced people, November 2021: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/a-peoples-vaccine-for-refugees-ensuring-access-to-covid-19-vaccines-for-refugee-621312/

\textsuperscript{13} The Global Compact on Refugees, Para. 72. & 73.

\textsuperscript{14} Global Compact on Refugees Digital Platform https://globalcompactrefugees.org/channel/pledges-contributions


specialized in asylum and immigration law partnered with the private sector to train 1000 lawyers to support with evacuation and complementary pathways to safety for those at risk.

For its part, the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative with 15 partners undertook a mid-term review of progress on their joint pledge to advance refugee self-reliance. The group collectively reached refugees, other displaced populations, and host communities in 28 countries through self-reliance programming, measurement, advocacy, and research initiatives. This led to lessons learned that NGOs would like to emphasize for all stakeholders:

1. Collaboration: The group noted the importance of working in partnership both to expand the reach towards shared goals and to strengthen the design and implementation of programs and policies by bringing in a diversity of perspectives from the humanitarian and development ecosystem.
2. Co-created, used, and shared learning: The group encouraged pledging agencies to document and share learning that is being generated from the implementation of pledges with the wider community of practice to support building an evidence base of effective policies and practices.
3. Refugee-centered: The group emphasized the importance of keeping priorities rooted in the reality of the communities for and with whom we work, through hearing directly from refugees of different ages, genders, and diversities as we conceive of, design, and implement programs, craft advocacy messages, undertake research and by inviting refugees to participate in priority setting and stocktaking efforts.

Others have taken major steps towards implementing pledges enacting meaningful refugee participation, for example by overhauling recruitment and hiring practices, offering significant pro bono support to refugee-led organizations, and convening the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative. NGOs also have supported progress on refugee self-reliance, labor market access and work rights; for example, NGOs associated with one joint pledge have undertaken self-reliance programming, measurement, advocacy, and research in 28 countries so far, while other NGOs are currently partnering to advocate for greater respect for refugees’ work-related rights in various regions around the world.

Pledges made on statelessness must not be forgotten, including through new Member States accessing the UN Statelessness Conventions, removing gender discrimination in nationality laws, strengthening safeguards against childhood statelessness, improving birth registration, and establishing statelessness determination procedures. Moreover, it remains important to increase pledges and more effectively mainstream priorities to protect stateless people and prevent statelessness through increased programming and resource allocation – including in line with recommendations from the recent external evaluation of UNHCR-led Initiatives to End Statelessness.

NGOs have also shared many examples of good practices, such as on maintaining mental health and psycho-social support, on finding durable solutions for displaced and stateless people, on direct and meaningful participation of refugees in all decisions that affect them, and on emergency preparedness.

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18 Refugee Self Reliance Initiative Pledge, 2019: https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/grf-pledge
19 The Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative, a coalition of refugee-led organizations, provides flexible multi-year funding to RLOs and advocates for greater resources, more effective inclusion, and equitable positioning for NGOs led by those most affected by forced displacement: https://www.refugeeslead.org/
20 Refugee Self Reliance Initiative Pledge, 2019: https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/grf-pledge
and response. Hence, NGOs call on all stakeholders including governments, donors, and the private sector to engage in such efforts.

3. Looking forward to the second GRF

NGOs acknowledge the work done by various stakeholders and UNHCR to implement pledges, but we also recognize that more needs to be done to fulfil the GCR’s principles and commitments. We will soon enter in a new phase, leading to the second Global Refugee Forum and marking five years since the affirmation of the Global Compact, in 2023. In this period, it will be important to strengthen the GCR arrangements, consolidate, document, and measure tangible results. It will also be crucial to have an early start to reflect on the best ways to prepare and organize this second Forum, in line with the Compact’s multi-stakeholder and partnership approach, while generating equitable, sustained, and predictable contributions. To this end, we highlight the following priorities:

1) Devise a collective process to identify the main 2023 GRF themes

First, there is a need to address the larger protection crisis and deepen the focus on protection and protection capacity to expand the understanding of those terms beyond the reception and admission of refugees. This should lead us to focus on areas such as strengthening the international refugee legal regime, legal aid, and climate-induced displacement. Child protection and GBV prevention and response services should also be considered as lifesaving and their centrality recognized in spending decisions, resources, and pledges alike. In the same vein, more attention should be paid to the different and specific protection needs of people of all genders, with disabilities and other vulnerability characteristics. NGOs suggest having a series of inclusive consultations on protection and protection capacity in 2022 – beyond the Asylum Support Capacity Group – to take stock and identify key gaps and specific areas of focus. We also recommend leveraging the recommendations of the ongoing review of the IASC Protection Policy.

Education for the most marginalised children, including refugees, and with special attention to keeping girls in school, must be kept a priority, even in the current difficult socio-economic and health context. We must not lose sight of the global commitment made in the Global Compact on Refugees to get all children in school and learning within a few months of their displacement, including the responsibility the international community shares to enact this promise with refugee hosting countries.

As the Global Compact on Refugees recognises the importance of addressing statelessness through building resilience, solidarity, solutions, and benchmarking progress, it will be vital that statelessness is properly mainstreamed as a key cross-cutting issue for the agenda of the next Global Refugee Forum. Moreover, the timing of the second GRF will provide a pivotal push for the final phase of the #Ibelong campaign. Age, gender, and diversity considerations should be also key cross-cutting issues. Stakeholders should be encouraged to include, monitor, and report on the different impacts of actions on diverse groups.

Finally, more systemic, direct, and meaningful participation of refugees and displaced populations, including children and youth, girls, and women, should be institutionalized in the lead up to the 2023 GRF. Participation should not be limited to formal events; it should include opportunities to engage in the design of the processes, such as the development of agendas and any accompanying processes. Outreach towards meaningful refugee participation should crucially recognize and include a diverse
representation of forcibly displaced communities to ensure that the diversity of refugee voices, experiences, and perspectives is adequately captured.

2) Organize pledging to ensure a meaningful and trackable compendium of pledges

Reviving co-sponsorship groups is an idea with potential if improvements are made with the design and provided that those groups are sustainable and not duplicative of other forums, for example, sticking to topics that were insufficiently addressed at the first GRF such as responsibility-sharing. Crucially, these groups would need to engage refugee co-sponsors. Additionally, such an approach could be strengthened through a more prominent coordinating role for UNHCR. Likewise, it would be important to set up a matching system ahead of the GRF, rather than the current *ex post facto* approach, to drive more collective/joint pledges highlighting the value of multi-stakeholder pledges. This new system could help provide better pledging guidance.

To ensure a more meaningful and trackable compendium of pledges, there needs to be more communication about the pledges themselves according to different categories, how they are working together and the complementarity and coherence between them to achieve larger outcomes. In particular, new and existing pledges need to be better defined categories, aligned with the GCR indicators. This could encourage stakeholders who have not met similar standards or made similar pledges and might make it easier to identify potential collaboration opportunities. NGOs also suggest that pledges are encouraged to be as result-orientated and measurable as possible and based on pre-established costed plans. Although the principle of additionality calls for avoiding repackaging pledges, new pledges will need to focus on supporting the pledges already made.

Pledges and progress on implementation should be widely and more effectively publicized so that civil society – including refugee-led organizations, national and local NGOs – can perform its quintessential function of holding governments accountable to the people they govern. With fewer avenues for holding their host governments accountable, refugees may particularly rely on the power of civil society organizing to ensure a government fulfills its promises.

Once the themes have been identified, workshops could be organized in late 2022 or early 2023 between different actors, for example gathering legal aid providers and interested donors, to try to get concrete matches and/or joint pledges in place.

3) Shape a meaningful result oriented GRF event

NGOs advocate for meaningful participation of diverse groups of refugees of different ages, genders, and diversities in the design process and increased support considering virtual tools as well as language accessibility and interpretation services, financial support for participation, and consular support to obtain visas and other travel documents. There must also be a clear, transparent, accessible, and funded application process to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation of refugees and RLOs in the 2023 GRF process. NGOs also recommend matchmaking opportunities at the GRF to partner up with like-minded organizations or to fill logistical gaps. Side events are encouraged

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22 Representatives of the world’s refugee communities, were largely absent from the Global Refugee Forum, representing less than 3% of the Forum’s participants. See: UNHCR, *The Global Refugee Forum at a Glance*, p. 1: https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/2019%20GRF%20at%20a%20Glance.pdf This will need to be corrected, building on a proper consultation process in the next two years with refugees, forcibly displaced and stateless populations. In this regard, the participation of refugee children including girls will be also extremely important in the lead-up to and at the second GRF.
and should be planned for early on in the process. Similarly, participation of refugees living in the Global South, including those confined in camps, should be ensured equitably with refugees living in the Global North.

Meaningful participation should also be about ensuring space for civil society organisations to fulfil their role and express their voice, particularly in large refugee hosting countries facing protracted displacement situations. For example, structures bringing together both refugee-led organizations as well as host community civil society organizations can improve coordination and cooperation amongst refugee-led, local, and national organizations working with diverse refugee and host communities. These types of bodies are pivotal in creating unified advocacy messages and programs/initiatives which work for all.

4) Ensure a transparent and efficient follow-up and review process

UNHCR should leverage its leadership at country level and work with governments – hosts and donors – to accelerate the implementation of GRF commitments as well as the monitoring of the Compact’s implementation. Such efforts could include the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms with clear objectives on jointly delivering of pledges and serve as a space to monitor national level implementation. In addition, national monitoring of the GCR implementation should include the collection and analysis of disaggregated data on sex, age, disability, and diversity with measurable indicators to assess progress. Local and refugee-led organisations should also be supported to engage with national level processes around the Global Refugee Forum, including by having the space to advocate for specific pledges based on their local expertise and experiences.

At global level, there is a need to update, improve and simplify the dashboard – a very difficult tool to navigate – as well as to improve other tracking and follow-up processes, especially to encourage collaboration and greater partnerships amongst pledgers focused on similar themes. Substantially new and specific commitments, with restatements of existing commitments, should be identified and included in the tracking of progress towards delivering promises in the Compact.

Any pledging system should include a robust accountability mechanism, lest it merely provides a fig leaf for continued evasion of our collective responsibility to and for refugees. There should be strong encouragement for all pledges to include clear and measurable deliverables as well as timelines for completion. This will allow reinforcing accountability mechanisms to properly track progress. In situations where a timeline is not possible, the pledge should include clear milestones by which progress is tracked.

In reviewing progress since the GCR was affirmed in 2018, important data gaps have emerged. We urge the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) to either generate and/or collect more granular data on refugees’ living conditions, including their health, education, protection, livelihoods, and other dimensions of their lives. Longitudinal studies based on data disaggregated by age, gender, diversity, and displacement status will allow us to have a more accurate picture of refugee well-being, both at global and at country level. The JDC should play a more central role in informing the next GRF and providing baseline data on refugee outcomes for the next GCR Indicator Report.

In conclusion, NGOs urge UNHCR, Member States and other stakeholders to join in the effort towards an early mobilization and planning towards the second Global Refugee Forum. This process should
allow for broader, direct, and meaningful participation, including from diverse refugee and host communities.

We should also not forget that the next two years will not only be about preparing for the next Forum but also about ensuring the implementation of all pledges. The first imperative is indeed to make sure current pledges are effectively implemented, including those made in October 2019 at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness and that all stakeholders remain focused on real, tangible protection outcomes for refugees and more equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\) See the recommendations already made by several NGOs in the report *The Global Compact three years on: navigating barriers and maximising incentives in support of refugees and host countries, Op. cit.*