

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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NGO Statement on the Global Compact on Refugees and the outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum

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 are grateful for this opportunity to contribute to the discussions on the status of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), particularly in light of the outcomes of the recently held first Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

The NGO community welcomed the arranging of the first-ever GRF in Geneva from 16-18 December 2019. It served as a first test to gauge the viability of the GCR to generate new and meaningful commitments from Member States and other stakeholders to improve the situation of refugees and host communities worldwide.

Our assessment of the Forum, and the future importance of the GCR, have to look at different levels to determine “success”, notably the several expectations set in the GCR. In the first instance, we think it was a major feat to have pulled together such an important gathering within a relatively short time frame, and amidst a global political climate towards refugees and other displaced people that remains very challenging. The fact that the GRF took place, was well attended (more on that below) and drew significant interest from a wide variety of stakeholders, is in itself a feat and should therefore be seen as a success.

In terms of participation, we were pleased to see a heterogeneous field of attendees, including refugees and civil society. Nonetheless, the ambition to combine a high-level political meeting with a Forum for discussing technical issues also led to some unfortunate restrictions on the ability of especially smaller, nationally based NGOs to attend. Likewise, and although much improved when compared to similar events in years' past, refugee participation remained challenging, and refugees were not always well included in the discussions at the GRF, also and particularly due to their being relatively left out of large portions of the preparatory process or included too late.

Secondly, we positively note the large number of pledges made at the GRF (leading up to, at, and after), totalling more than 1,200¹. At last count, NGOs as a stakeholder group were leading both in the number of pledges submitted, as well as in the number of good practices shared. This shows the enormous amount of dedication invested in the GRF by civil society, and our positive outlook and hope for effective implementation of the GCR going forward. We would have liked to have seen a larger number of joint pledges, which constituted less than one fourth (about 19%²) of all pledges made. In this regard, efforts by stakeholders were somewhat hampered by the rapidly changing format and working methodology of the various co-sponsorship groups in the lead-up to the Forum, as well as UNHCR's limited capacity to act as a “matchmaker” between different stakeholders. It is our hope that

¹ UNHCR, [Digital Platform for the Global Compact on Refugees](#), as of the 06 March 2020

² *ibid*

this function can be strengthened and be actively taken forward during the immediate follow-up phase (see below).

Thirdly, regarding the content of the pledges, and our hopes and expectations going forward, a complex picture emerges.

Responsibility-sharing arrangements had been one of the themes of most concern during the preparations since not many States seemed willing to engage substantively in what was intended to be the overarching goal for the GCR and the Forum. Among the different elements, some information was shared about the Support Platforms, although specifics about how they would be operated and financed remained vague. The Spotlight Sessions on particular regional situations, for example regarding the regional response to migrants and refugees from Venezuela, were densely packed with presentations, which gave some insight into how States have responded, but left insufficient space for discussion, for example on criteria for refugee status determination.

On Protection Capacity, discussions and State pledges primarily focused on the expected work of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, and within that, on encouraging peer-to-peer pairings, mainly among States, whereas civil society actors highlighted their activities and related pledges aimed at ensuring legal representation for refugees. We are concerned about a potential gap here in terms of State priorities versus priorities of refugees and NGOs, with the former, especially donor countries, being primarily interested in increasing the capacity of countries of first asylum to absorb large refugee flows, which might compromise the ability of refugees to access effective protection along their route.

On Durable Solutions, we welcome the busy pledging activity around resettlement and complementary pathways, while noting that the pledges of 50,000 additional places offered fall far short of the projected resettlement needs for this year, estimated by UNHCR to be more than 1,400,000. We also regret the lack of discussion on quality resettlement. Other Durable Solutions – voluntary repatriation and local integration – did not lead to in-depth discussions on principles and necessary conditions, although NGOs highlighted the links between good asylum policy, integration and successful returns. NGOs call for ensuring that recognised Durable Solutions are not undermined.

While the discussion on **Energy and Infrastructure** progressed somewhat beyond primarily addressing the carbon footprint of humanitarian operations, and UNHCR during the Spotlight Session helpfully noted the need to integrate these initiatives with more comprehensive and robust policies on achieving climate justice and addressing climate change as a driver of displacement, we were disappointed to not see this aspect addressed more directly by Member States, and this is an area in which much work remains to be done.

We noted the active participation of the private sector especially in the theme of **Jobs and Livelihoods**, with roughly 224³ related pledges according to UNHCR. As with some of the other themes, however, we would like to highlight the importance of ensuring a rights-based approach during the implementation of any initiative, and the safeguarding of refugees' labour rights in all cases, particularly in view of some of the problematic lessons that need to be learned in this regard from initiatives such as the Jordan Compact, which were discussed during NGO-led side events at the GRF.

The Education area of focus at the Global Refugee Forum has secured unprecedented support with 68 official co-sponsors, including 16 States⁴. Education is a primary focus for many of our organisations, we were encouraged to see a large number of pledges in this area, including a joint

³ *ibid*

⁴ UNHCR, [co-sponsors for the Global Refugee Forum](#), as of the 06 March 2020

pledge of improved collaboration, coordination, and financing of global efforts by the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education, and Education Cannot Wait. These pledges are a very good start but will not fill all the gaps or meet all the needs that exist. We need to continue to sustain the practical action needed to support refugee-hosting States to provide both their citizens and the refugees they host with the opportunity to learn.

Other themes that we felt were under-represented and/or left out entirely from discussions at the GRF include the situation of asylum seekers; Internally Displaced Persons, despite the near-simultaneous launch of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and the often-hinted-at possibility of the GCR to act as a conduit for such discussions; as well as the issue of Statelessness; Health; the root causes of displacement; the Humanitarian-Peace-Development nexus; current forced displacement contexts such as the Rohingyas crisis, Burkina Faso, Western Sahara, South Sudan for instance. In addition, the question of how to ensure complementarity in the implementation of both the GCR and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) remained unexplored but will be important to pursue as States start to develop national GCM implementation plans that may have positive reinforcing effects on the GCR engagement, especially in the areas of pathways, addressing vulnerabilities in migration, saving lives, and improving screening and referral mechanisms.

Finally, as mentioned above, we are now looking forward to effective follow-up and implementation to turn the GRF pledges into a reality that speaks to situations of refugees on the ground. In order to make this happen, it would be helpful to receive an update on the various groups that have self-organised in the wake of the GRF as well as discuss the modalities of work of these various groups, in order to enable continued multi-stakeholder engagement. NGOs stand ready to contribute to the various tools and arrangements included and coming out of the GRF and we were pleased to learn on the side-lines of the Forum that the mandate of the GRF Team is being extended. We look forward to their active coordination role in this endeavour.

Thank you, Chair.