

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
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**NGO Statement on Update 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.

NGOs welcomed the arranging of the first-ever Global Refugee Forum in Geneva last December. It served as a first test to gauge the viability of the Compact to generate new and meaningful commitments from 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. First, it was a major feat to have organized such an important gathering within a short time frame, and amidst a very challenging global political climate towards refugees and other displaced people. The fact that the GRF took place, was well attended and drew significant interest from a wide variety of stakeholders, should 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 past events, refugee participation remained challenging, and refugees were not always well included in discussions at the GRF, also due to their being brought late in the preparatory process.

Secondly, we positively note the large number of pledges made leading up to, at, and after the Forum. NGOs as a stakeholder group were leading both in the number of pledges and in the number of best practices shared. This shows the dedication invested in the GRF by civil society, and our hopes for effective GCR implementation going forward. We would have liked to have seen a larger number of joint pledges though. Moreover, efforts by stakeholders were somewhat hampered by the rapidly changing format and working methodology of the co-sponsorship groups in the lead-up to the Forum, which included limited opportunities for matchmaking between different stakeholders. NGOs hope that this function can be strengthened and actively taken forward during the immediate follow-up phase.

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 most important concern during the preparations since not many States seemed willing to engage substantively in this central GCR and GRF goal. Some information was shared about the Support Platforms, although specifics about how they would operate and be financed remained vague. The Spotlight Sessions on particular regional situations were densely packed with presentations, which gave some insight into how States have responded, but left insufficient space for discussion.

On Protection Capacity, discussions and State pledges primarily focused on the expected work of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, and on encouraging peer-to-peer pairings, whereas NGOs highlighted their activities and related pledges focused on legal representation for refugees. We are concerned about a potential gap 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 additional places offered fall far short of the projected resettlement needs. 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.

Discussions on Energy and Infrastructure progressed beyond addressing the carbon footprint of humanitarian operations, and UNHCR 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. Nonetheless, we were disappointed to not see this aspect addressed more directly by States. Much remains to be done.

We noted the active participation of the private sector especially on Jobs and Livelihoods. However, we wish 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.

Education has secured unprecedented support of co-sponsors, including 16 States. As education is a primary focus for many of our organisations, we were encouraged to see a large number of pledges. Although a very good start, this will not fill all the gaps or meet all existing needs. We need to continue to increase practical support to host States to provide both their citizens and refugees the opportunity to learn.

Other themes that we felt were under or not represented include asylum seekers situations; IDPs; Statelessness; Health; root causes of displacement and current forced displacement contexts such as the Rohingyas crisis. Besides, the question of how to ensure complementarity between both Global Compacts 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, and improving screening and referral mechanisms.

Finally, as mentioned above, we are now looking forward to effective follow-up and implementation. To make this happen, it would be helpful to receive an update on the groups that have self-organised in the wake of the GRF and discuss future work modalities, in order to enable continued multi-stakeholder engagement. NGOs stand ready to contribute to the many tools and arrangements included and coming out of the GRF and we were pleased to learn that the mandate of the GRF Team is being extended, so we look forward to their active coordination role in this endeavour.

A detailed version is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.