

InterAction Refugee Policy Working Group Key Messages
UNHCR Thematic Discussion 1
“Past and Current Burden and Responsibility-Sharing Arrangements”

The language in the New York Declaration specifically committing Member States to “more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting the world’s refugees” was groundbreaking. The Refugee Compact and related “Programme of Action” should be used as the next steps to translate this critical rhetorical commitment into concrete actions. The key elements of responsibility sharing are interlocking and interdependent; meaning that the balance of commitments across actors is fundamental to successfully managing refugee crises. Pursuing multiple solutions simultaneously for refugees using all means available is critical to ensuring that the asylum space remains open, refugees are afforded essential rights and access to basic services and that adequate support is provided to refugees and the communities and countries that host them.

Specific Mutually-Shared Plans

- Some of the examples used in the Concept Paper and others from recent history underscore this interdependence and demonstrate the centrality of developing mutually agreed upon plans for each refugee situation that delineate the requirements of all actors to making them work. This was particularly the case with the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees and the Humanitarian Evacuation and Transfer Programme for refugees fleeing Kosovo, in which specific “burden-sharing” agreements were struck involving multiple states, donors and international institutions to support refugee-hosting countries.
- As best practices and lessons learned are considered in rolling out the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) process and drafting the Programme of Action, we would suggest that a transparent and inclusive process be followed to develop specific plans for responsibility sharing in each refugee situation. These plans should adhere to international human rights and refugee law, including through access to asylum safeguards and respect for non-refoulement, *and* also identify:
 - mutually agreed upon goals that focus on specific outcomes that the stakeholders would like to achieve for both refugees and host populations;
 - legal and policy changes necessary to improve the national/local protection environment for refugees and to reach the identified goals and;
 - levels of financing, specific areas for investment and technical support required by the host country and local authorities in refugee hosting areas to reach the goals.
- As the CRRF process has rolled out in a handful of countries, it is unclear what specific plan has been identified to guide implementation and what the process is to develop it. This is particularly problematic in terms of how financing—both multilateral and bilateral—is used to advance the comprehensive response. While we are aware that certain donors have committed to supporting the CRRF process in country, it is unclear how they will do that, what gaps remain and how the total funding will be used to catalyze transformation and better outcomes for refugees and host communities. Similarly, it is unclear whether, and if so how, assistance from the World Bank’s new financing mechanism supporting refugee hosting countries will be used to advance the CRRF process.

Tracking and Sharing Progress on Commitments

- Equally as critical to responsibility sharing as specific and mutually agreed upon plans, is a mechanism to track the delivery of commitments in support of them. Responsibility sharing is only as good as actions actually taken to help shoulder refugee crises. While many pledging conferences take place—as noted throughout the Concept Paper—disbursement of resources often lags woefully behind. Each responsibility-sharing plan for a given refugee crisis should be carefully tracked, both in terms of steps being taken by host countries to improve the protection

environment for refugees and in terms of the commitments made by donor states and international institutions which pledged financing, technical support and resettlement slots.

- In this regard, we would recommend that the Programme of Action also call for a global tracking mechanism for commitments made at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in 2016. This Summit was predicated on the responsibility-sharing frame and we fear that the groundbreaking commitments made are not being tracked (and met), making it difficult for those making pledges to be held to account by civil society.

Expanded Responsibility-Sharing Solutions

- Refugee response plans exist—including comprehensive ones that combine critical development and institutional strengthening support like the Syria “regional refugee and resilience” plan. However, they often focus exclusively on financing and do not combine other critical responsibility-sharing elements like local integration and resettlement into a larger and more clearly interlocking agreement between host countries and other Member States. While the international community has contributed \$11 billion dollars toward the 3RP, it has certainly not put forward commitments to resettling Syrian refugees commensurate with the scale of the crisis or in line with previous resettlement actions like those for Indochinese refugees.
- While permanent resettlement with a path to citizenship should be the ultimate aim, refugees who may not be prioritized for resettlement and persons who may not meet the refugee definition but nevertheless cannot safely return, should have access to complementary admissions schemes (e.g. humanitarian admissions, expanded family reunion, educational and employment visa programs). These complementary schemes must guarantee minimum protection safeguards and an accompanying status so that refugees can regain their dignity and self-sufficiency. The Programme of Action should encourage a deeper expansion of creative protection mechanisms to be used to take responsibility sharing for refugees and encourage Member States to exchange best practice on means of implementing them.
- Additional emphasis should be placed on the responsibility-sharing elements required to provide a more “expanded” set of solutions to refugees given the traditional durable solutions are unattainable to so many of them. As noted in InterAction’s recent paper [“Solutions with Rights”](#) on essential elements for inclusion into the Global Compact on Refugees, local integration—though short of obtaining citizenship—continues to be the most available solution to the vast majority of refugees. Therefore significant emphasis must be placed on creating supportive conditions for refugee self-reliance and access basic services during their displacement.

Leveraging Commitments to Improve Hosting Environments

- The Concept Paper did not focus on the dramatic differences that exist across the spectrum of countries providing asylum to refugees in terms of the rights afforded to them to move freely, access local and national services and pursue means for self-reliance like work and educational opportunities. While context is highly important, adequate responsibility-sharing efforts by other Member States is critical to ensuring that refugees are not only afforded protection by their host states, but that they are able to live in dignity while displaced. It is essential that responsibility-sharing agreements focus not only on helping refugee hosting communities and countries weather the impacts of a crisis, but as a lever to improve host country statute and policies that prohibit refugees from accessing the full range of rights they deserve.
- Furthermore, we are concerned that refugee hosting states that stepped forward at the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees with commitments to improve the hosting environment for refugees are not being adequately supported to deliver on those commitments. If we are to truly realize a vision of global responsibility sharing for refugees, we cannot let one of the most monumental steps toward this vision the international community has taken—and the first after the New York Declaration was adopted—to die on the vine.