

Response to Draft 1 of the Global Compact: Increasing Recognition of Older Refugees

30 April 2018

After reviewing Draft 1 of the Global Compact on Refugees, we were pleased to see that ageing was addressed and referenced. This is an important step towards ensuring the rights of older refugees form part of the Global Compact.

We believe that the language of the draft could be strengthened to offer additional opportunities where older refugees' rights and needs could be better addressed.

The global population is ageing at a rapid speed. We estimate that up to 35 million older persons may currently be affected by disasters.¹ As the global population ages, and displacement and protracted crises increase further, so will the number of older refugees. Global stakeholders are at significant risk of not meeting their humanitarian commitments, being in breach of humanitarian accountability principles, and risk not being able to respond effectively and efficiently to this diverse population group.

We recognize the Global Compact is a broad document and needs to encompass all refugees; however, references to inclusion, including age and disability are sparse. It is essential that the Global Compact **uses inclusive language that recognises the different experiences of older men and women, including those with disabilities**, in the context of displacement. We have made six (6) specific followed by two (2) general recommendations for where this language and inclusion could be strengthened.

Specific Recommendations

Below, we suggest specific areas where the Global Compact draft 1 language can be *easily* edited to better reflect the experiences of older refugees and the way global systems can better respond to these experiences.

Paragraph 31: Include older persons in the following sentence: "...explore how best to include refugees, particularly women and youth **AND OLDER PERSONS**, in key fora, institutions, and decision-making processes, including by facilitating language learning, as well as access to information, for instance through low-cost mobile phone and internet subscriptions."

REASONING: Not only are older persons' needs different from younger populations, but older persons' right to participate and the contributions they can make should be recognised. The experience, skills and capacities of older persons should be considered as a valuable resource for refugee and host communities. Recognizing that they may need specific assistance, for example with language learning and access to information, like children and women, reduces the risk of older refugees not receiving the same level of support as other age groups. It also can help them to better contribute to the development of appropriate responses for older refugees, and for their wider communities, for example through providing experience and knowledge on how best to respond to the needs of other refugees of all ages from within a specific culture or community. This is highly relevant for example in contexts of repeated displacement over the life course.

¹ Missing Millions: how older people with disabilities are excluded from humanitarian response. Authors: Phillip Sheppard and Sarah Polack, International Centre for Evidence in Disability at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and Madeleine McGivern, HelpAge International, April 2018. <http://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/millions-of-older-people-with-disabilities-risk-being-excluded-from-humanitarian-assistance-new-report-reveals/>

Paragraph 40, Bullet 1: “promote the development of common standards for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of age, gender and diversity disaggregated data on refugees and returnees, in line with relevant data protection policies;” **ADD FOOTNOTE(S)**

REASONING: The Global Compact should state the importance of and need for rigorous sex, age, and disability disaggregated data collection and analysis, and the use of the Washington Group questions (<http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>) to be collected and used to inform programming in contexts of displacement. At minimum, the Washington Group resource should be listed as a **Footnote**.

Data collection should include ten-year age cohorts. We recognize that data collection in displacement contexts can be challenging, especially in a rapid onset emergency. However, this data collection, and the use of the Washington Group questions, is essential at field level to ensure that the rights and needs of older refugees, including those with disabilities, are upheld and addressed through appropriate humanitarian assistance and protection. If ten-year cohorts are not possible, **at minimum, data should be collected for the 60-79 and 80+ age groups recognizing there can be significant differences between the two age groups (young-old and old-old)**. This could be included as a **Footnote** for easy reference.

In addition, the reference in the draft Global Compact to ‘sex, age and diversity disaggregation’ needs to be better specified. The **broad reference to ‘diversity’ does not adequately convey the types of data** that should be collected (i.e. sex, age and disability).

Paragraph 46: Include older persons in the following sentence: “...assist with initial registration and identification of specific needs, including protection risks, notably of women under certain circumstances and those of unaccompanied and separated children, **AND OLDER PERSONS...**”

REASONING: This would conclude that a short section could be added specifically for older persons such as the ones for women and children under section 1.5 on page 10. Additionally, we recommend that the *Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities* (<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-inclusion-standards-older-people-and-people-disabilities>) are included in the Global Compact as a practical guide to supporting older refugees with disabilities, and as a tool to ensure inclusive programming in response to displacement. We suggest that the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards be a practical tool through which UNHCR and other agencies make the Global Compact operational and ensure inclusive work with older refugees / displaced persons, including those with disabilities.

Paragraph 61, first bullet point- Include older persons in the following sentence: “...promote economic opportunities for host communities and refugees, including specifically for women, young adults, **OLDER PERSONS** and those with disabilities, through enabling policy, legal, and administrative frameworks.”

REASONING: So that older refugees can financially manage their needs, especially those who are caregivers to younger family members (skipped generations), they may need opportunities for education and re-training in a new community to develop new job skills. Many older persons contribute to household income, particularly in displacement contexts, and they face barriers to accessing economic opportunities (e.g. discrimination).²

² HelpAge International. (2012). *The Neglected Generation: the impact of displacement on older people*. London

Paragraph 62: Include older persons in the following sentence: “In line with national and local health care policies and plans, as well as the 2030 Agenda, and in support of host countries, other States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to expand national health systems to facilitate access by refugees and host communities including, in particular, women, children and youth, **OLDER PERSONS** and people with disabilities.”

REASONING: This section completely disregards the fact that older refugees can have very different health needs compared to younger populations. Older refugees’ health concerns might include but are not limited to physical and mental health issues such as dementia, depression, hearing loss, eye problems, osteoporosis, higher prevalence of cardiovascular disease, cancer, higher frequencies of falls, hip-fractures, incontinence, and medicine management, and health-related end of life issues, including palliative and hospice care. Not recognizing that the health needs of older refugees, many of which are age-related, can be very different to those of other groups, risks the rights of older persons to receive the health and care services they are entitled to, being denied.

Paragraph 68: Include older persons in the following sentence: “Acknowledging that food and nutrition are priority basic needs in line with the 2030 Agenda, and in support of host countries, other States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to facilitate access by refugees and host communities to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, with specific attention to nutritionally vulnerable groups, such as pregnant and lactating women, infants between 6 and 24 months, young children, and adolescent girls, **AND OLDER PERSONS.**”

REASONING: Clear evidence shows how the nutrition needs of older persons are different from younger populations. Older persons, particularly in forced displacement, have higher rates of malnutrition, which, if not properly addressed, can be life-threatening.³ Often nutrition offered in emergency situations is not suitable for older persons. In addition, changes in health and medications can require different types of nutrition.

General Recommendations

- 1) Add section on age-specific issues:** The Global Compact covers issues specifically regarding girls and women. It does not recognize that **older persons are a specific group that may require additional and/or age-specific support and resources**, like other special groups noted in the Global Compact. In the current Global Compact draft, Page 10, section 1.5 is specifically for children and Page 14 offers an entire section on gender. Age is a variable which brings about specific opportunities. **Adding a short section on age-specific issues** would help ensure that those reading the Global Compact and applying it through the Programme of Action, will be aware that older refugees’ needs can be much different from younger refugees. It should also highlight that they can offer a valuable contribution at all stages of refugee response.
- 2) Clarify language:** We must acknowledge that those refugees, including older women and men with / without disabilities, who are in danger of being left behind are at risk not because they are ‘hard to reach’ but because **our current systems are not set up to support these people**. With this acknowledgement would come changes to the systems and structures used during responses to large movements of refugees. For example, the current draft talks about enabling registration of refugees without referencing that there may be people who cannot physically access these reception points. This is a very tangible example of how the document, and the system, needs to be changed to show an understanding of the barriers that can prevent older persons, including those with disabilities, from access to humanitarian assistance and protection.

³ HelpAge International. (2012). Food Security and Livelihoods Interventions for Older People in Emergencies. London

We believe our suggestions above offer straight forward opportunities to strengthen the current text to ensure it responds to the wide range of different needs that different refugees have, to ensure that the rights of all refugees are upheld, and that *no one is left behind*.

**~~Respectfully submitted by the NGO Committee on Ageing, Geneva and
Working Group Member Organizations**