



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the
Fourth Formal Consultation towards a Global Compact on Refugees
**Statement 3 – Programme of Action: Areas in need of support – meeting needs and supporting
communities (Part. III.B.2)**
Geneva, 9 May 2018

The Delegation of the Holy See welcomes the relevance given in the latest Draft to the healthcare and education of refugees, two areas where the Catholic Church through its many institutions is deeply engaged.

My Delegation fully agrees with the critical importance of adopting policies that allow refugee children to access quality education from the early stages of their displacement, in order to help protect them from human trafficking, forced labor and other forms of slavery. Schools are a form of protection where the safety of children can be monitored and fostered.¹ For these reasons, we think that it would be important for the Draft to acknowledge the need to enact policies which ensure that the primary and secondary education to which refugees have access meets the same standards of education received by citizens.

Regarding subsection 2.2 on “Jobs and livelihoods” the Holy See Delegation welcomes the reference to decent work and the various measures outlined to foster inclusive economic growth for host communities and refugees, as well as in support of host countries. At the same time, we wish to underline that development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. While people and communities have material needs, human flourishing and wellbeing also have spiritual, social and political dimensions.

Rather than placing the focus on the economic aspects only, it is important to put the human person at the center of our considerations. For this reason, we wish to propose an addition to the measures outlined in Paragraph 74, in order to underline the importance of promoting, alongside economic opportunities also “national policies and laws required for safe and lawful employment, as well as for livelihood strategies, especially in ensuring safeguards against abuse and exploitation and legal protections”.

Mr. Chair,

The importance of granting access to healthcare is self-explanatory. The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health should be exercised through non-discriminatory, comprehensive laws, policies and practices firmly rooted in the centrality of the human person and founded on the right to life.

¹ Cf. *Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Points*, Migrants and Refugees Section, Holy See’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The many Catholic-inspired organizations that are working in synergy alongside the UNHCR in the common objective of protection and assistance, find themselves in a position to promote the true dignity of refugees, based on strict ethical guidelines. In this regard, it is important to keep an underlying holistic and integrated approach throughout the Draft, with a strong focus on the centrality of the human person and his/her dignity. The ambiguity of some of the language in the current drafting, including the misleading idea of a presumably agreed “alignment” on undefined and non-specified “international standards”, and some references made in the footnotes to documents and to principles and guidelines that do not necessarily share international consensus, may undermine the impact and effectiveness of this vital cooperation and of the GCR altogether.

In this regard, under the subsection 2.3 on “Health” at the beginning of Paragraph 75 the Draft refers to “States and relevant stakeholders”, but footnote 53 only outlines some intergovernmental agencies while leaving out many other relevant actors. We believe it is important to ensure that the health aspects of forced displacement be considered in the context of broader government policies and in engaging and coordinating with other sectors, including civil society, the private sector, refugees’ associations and the affected populations themselves, to find joint solutions that benefit the health of refugees.

For these reasons, in order to fill this gap in the drafting and to ensure a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, we would suggest to remove the footnote and rather rephrase the very beginning of the paragraph with the following: “In line with national health care policies and plans, and in support of host countries, States and relevant stakeholders, including intergovernmental agencies and civil society, will contribute.” We are happy to provide this in writing.

Mr. Chair,

The Delegation of the Holy See would also like to suggest a change to the title of section 2.4 from “Gender” to “Advancement of women and girls”, in order to make it clear that what we want to achieve is an increased participation and contribution of women and girls as stakeholders, based on the equality between women and men, as outlined in the introduction to the Programme of Action in Paragraph 13.

Additionally, there seems to be a lack of clarity behind of the rationale of including a specific bullet point related to health - i.e. the reference to “essential health packages” contained in the fourth bullet point - under section 2.4 dedicated to “gender”, when there already is a separate section, 2.3, which is solely dedicated to health.

It would be highly regrettable to impose some measures that would cause lengthy discussions on their content while ignoring the attention due to women’s dignity and the specific cultural and moral values of their country of origin. The Holy See and the many Catholic-inspired organizations working in the field are well aware of the particular risks that women and children unfortunately face in the context of humanitarian emergencies and their specific and integral needs regarding access to basic healthcare.

For these reasons, we would like to suggest some language which is consistent with section 2.3 on “health”, in particular with Paragraph 76, bullet point 2, which would read: “facilitate access to age and gender-responsive social services, including through recruitment and deployment of female health workers, relevant primary, secondary, and tertiary health care, as well as flexibility in timing of immunization services.”

Mr. Chair,

Access to education and healthcare inspires hope among refugees and greatly contributes to restoring their dignity. Notwithstanding its non-binding legal nature, the Global Compact on Refugees will have a strong morally binding character. The Delegation of the Holy See considers it important to

assure that this document aims at truly improving the lives of millions of refugees who continually seek international protection and at assisting those local communities that generously host them.

The noble goals and spirit of the 1951 Refugees Convention set after the devastating experience of World War II will only remain alive if constantly renewed and inspired by a genuine sense of solidarity and responsibility toward the needier members of the human family. We should never forget this as we work together to develop the Global Compact on Refugees.

Thank you.