



Implementing ICVA's pledge at the Global Refugee Forum: looking back at the past two years

December 2021

Two years ago, at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) the International Council of Voluntary Agencies¹ (ICVA) pledged to support NGOs' engagement in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), particularly with regard to Protection Capacity and Solutions. In line with the priorities of the 2021 High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM), this written contribution aims at outlining progress achieved in implementing this pledge, despite challenges encountered. Two often overlooked stakeholder's engagement and pledging areas are highlighted, while the contribution also briefly looks at the future.

The ICVA pledge

At the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, ICVA pledged to "[Equip NGOs to engage with the Global Compact on Refugees implementation](#)". The pledge focused on promoting 1) the three traditional Durable Solutions as well as other local solutions and complementary pathways; 2) Protection Capacity including NGOs engagement with the Asylum Capacity Support Group; 3) Responsibility-sharing arrangements, particularly NGOs engagement with the Support Platforms; 4) Follow-up and review including from an NGO perspective and looking at planning for future Global Refugee Forums.

In fulfilling this pledge, ICVA mobilized its ways of working to ensure NGOs have the information, analysis, and support to engage actively and effectively with the GCR implementation, namely:

- ⇒ Disseminate information and analysis to a broad group of NGOs, beyond the ICVA membership.
- ⇒ Promote NGOs' collective and joint contributions including advocacy.
- ⇒ Promote NGOs' representation at multi-stakeholders' meetings at global and regional levels.
- ⇒ Facilitate NGOs' connection with key stakeholders such as UNHCR, Member States, International Organization, International Finance Institutions, and Academia.
- ⇒ Organize and support dedicated meetings, including face-to-face workshops and webinars fostering a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach, in coordination with NGOs worldwide.

A challenging environment for the implementation of all pledges

Over the past two years, all stakeholders faced exceptional disruptions and restrictive measures, resulted in the erosion of protection principles. Increased instances of *refoulement* worldwide, externalization practices, and other forms of mistreatment of refugees contravened international legal obligations, diminished responsibility-sharing, and ultimately undermined the pursuit of the GCR objectives. Border closures, restriction of movements, suspension of asylum procedures and other measures taken to protect public health and respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had a direct and detrimental impact on refugees' lives, self-reliance, access to protection and durable solutions.² The pandemic situation also complicated all stakeholders' interventions in addressing refugee issues and called for innovative adaptations. As many other stakeholders, ICVA's pledge implementation was affected by the disruptions, especially as time and efforts had to be reallocated to supporting NGOs' adaptation to the pandemic context.

¹ [The International Council of Voluntary Agencies \(ICVA\)](#) is a global network of humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.

² See UNHCR's COVID-19 Platform: Temporary Measures and Impact on Protection: https://im.unhcr.org/covid19_platform/



Pledge implementation: the ICVA experience

Planned face-to-face meetings and workshops were adjusted to full virtual exchanges aiming to reflect on the pandemic's impact, progress made in implementing GRF pledges as well as in the broader development of GCR arrangements. Particular attention was devoted to analyzing entry points for NGOs to contribute to those arrangements, identifying gaps in existing GRF pledges, and supporting a purposeful multi-stakeholder and partnership approach. ICVA has notably been actively engaged with events and processes such as the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, the Asylum Capacity Support Group, and various Support Platforms. In all instances, ICVA worked to bring an NGO perspective to the policy processes, for example through delivering an [NGO statement](#) at the July 2020 High-Level Meeting on the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees.

On another occasion, ICVA collaborated with INTERSOS to set-up a [webinar](#) on “Fostering protection and durable solutions through legal aid in humanitarian settings”. Based on INTERSOS’ GRF pledge fulfilled through a lesson learned paper on “[Provision of Legal Aid in Humanitarian Settings](#)”, this event highlighted the importance of legal aid in refugee protection and solutions programming, as well as contributions made by civil society in this realm. Moreover, ICVA organized with World Vision Zambia an [online meeting](#) focused on developments related to the GRF local integration pledge made by the Government of the Republic of Zambia. ICVA also built on regular exchanges held through UNHCR-NGO consultations where the GCR, pledges, and specific thematic areas were discussed, including early preparations for the High-Level Official Meetings.

Moreover, in the lead-up to the HLOM, ICVA also organized with the UNHCR Partnership and Coordination Service an online NGO stocktaking event to reflect on NGOs’ experience in implementing pledges, common challenges and ways to overcome them. Benefiting from perspectives and analysis presented by both UNHCR and NGOs, the event also shed light on areas in need of additional efforts. NGOs’ lessons learned from pledges implementation covered themes such as accountability, the importance of involving communities, age, gender, and diversity approaches, LGBTIQ+ perspectives in the protection of forcibly displaced populations. This meeting also launched a two-month process to develop a collective NGO statement to be delivered at the HLOM particularly highlighting recommendations for the process leading to the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

Over the past two years, ICVA also coordinated NGO statements delivered at [UNHCR’s governing bodies](#) as well as several relevant [informal briefings and consultations, putting forward](#) specific NGO priorities on pledges and the mobilization of GCR arrangements.

Along the way, information and analyses have been shared regularly through a dedicated NGO mailing list, focusing on GRF processes that needed clarifications as well as on developments around mechanisms and tools linked to the Global Compact on Refugees such as the Support Platforms and the Asylum Capacity Support Group. ICVA engaged in important background work and desk research geared towards developing synthesis outputs in the near future.

Focus on Durable Solutions and Solutions: Local integration and Local solutions

As the first GRF yielded a number of pledges on local integration, ICVA decided to focus on this often-neglected durable solution as part of its own pledge. The above-mentioned online multi-stakeholder meeting on local integration in Zambia was designed as an opportunity to reflect on options to advance local integration and ways forward in terms of policy and legal framework, economic prospects, livelihoods, infrastructures, social cohesion and social protection, funding, and coordination. In particular, the meeting highlighted the value of developing costed plans through a multi-stakeholder approach to unlock barriers to achieving local integration.



In 2021, ICVA also worked with UNHCR to bring clarity around paragraph 100 of the Global Compact on Refugees. This particularly entailed working on a paper developing a better understanding of how local solutions may contribute to offering additional avenues to durable solutions for refugees.³ It offers a definition and describes local solutions, highlighting the notion of transitional arrangements, as well as the protection guarantees and standards they should be accompanied with. In doing so, the paper also aims to outline elements useful for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledging process.

Focus on Legal aid

Providing legal aid to forcibly displaced populations is an essential requirement to ensure protection and achieve durable solutions, for instance in granting residency status, avoiding statelessness, addressing detention and deportation instances, to support refugee status determination, legal representation for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, or other forms of violence, particularly for women and girls. Such was the main message from the March 2021 INTERSOS-ICVA webinar on “Fostering protection and durable solutions through legal aid in humanitarian settings”. Considering the chronic lack of funding in this area, one of [the key findings and recommendations](#) identified by several stakeholders was to increase attention and galvanize new pledges on legal aid, for instance through the Asylum Capacity Support Group.

Next steps and looking at the future

In 2022, fostering a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach, ICVA will continue to support NGOs’ engagement in the GCR implementation and ensure NGOs bring their added value. Based on all the background work engaged, exchanges with NGOs and inputs, ICVA will further develop and disseminate analyses of entry points and avenues for NGO engagement in the Compact’s implementation. COVID-19 health protocols permitting, ICVA will also aim to resume the organization of in-person/hybrid meetings and workshops in Geneva and worldwide aiming primarily to coordinate and exchange with NGOs.

Going forward, the active participation, important contributions, and critical representation of a broad range of stakeholders, in particular NGOs and Refugee-Led Organizations, will be critical to achieving the Compact’s objectives and following up on the first Global Refugee Forum. In the lead-up to the second Global Refugee Forum, the multi-stakeholder and partnership approach can be strengthened to develop sustainable, predictable, and equitable responsibility-sharing in refugee situations.

³ The paper will be accessible under [ICVA webpage](#) on Forced Migration, Resources: Global Compact on Refugees

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