



Thank you co-chair.

NRC feels that it is essential to note that the fact that return is frequently the most politically expedient durable solution, political motivations cannot overshadow commitments to the voluntariness, safety, dignity and sustainability. While we appreciate the Concept Note's suggestion to ensure technical, financial and other support to returns, we do not want the Compact to miss an opportunity to set operational standards for these commitments.

'Voluntary' implies that the person making the choice to return has all relevant information available that is needed for coming to a decision, and that there is, in fact, a choice to make. Information on the repatriation processes and areas of return must be accurate, up-to-date, and easily accessible to all refugees. The onus should fall to implicated governments and operational agencies to proactively provide information to the refugee population using a variety of mediums.

All efforts to ensure that returns are truly voluntary will be undermined by any situation on the ground that leaves refugees with no other options or exposes them to pressure to return. Any actor imposing quotas or targets on a return process fundamentally removes the "voluntary" quality of that process. Measures ranging from encampment, restrictions on the right to work or providing minimal material support, to sudden refugee camp closure or deportation similarly remove voluntariness. Similarly pull factors to the country of origin should be limited. It is important that return packages not be used to incentivize return, particularly to areas where security and economic conditions remain precarious.

#### **The Global Compact on Refugees should**

- **Set minimum standards for information collection and sharing in voluntary return processes.**
- **Explicitly limit measures which incentivize return, including setting targets and quotas for return, restricting legal stay for refugees (including evictions or other measures specifically targeting refugees), or limiting access to humanitarian assistance, basic services, and livelihoods.**

The standard of safety includes physical safety, legal safety and material safety of the returning refugee. Substantial reflection is still needed on which steps can be taken to strengthen the obligation of States to ensure all three types of safety. Origin States often lack the capacity to provide the range of services necessary to meet these standards in a timely manner for their citizens who are returning. The methods for providing safety should also be under scrutiny. Refugees' agency in decision-making and their ability to hold States accountable for fulfilling their rights must not only be respected, but actively promoted throughout the return process.

#### **The Global Compact on Refugees should:**

- **Further clarify standards of safety, which must be met in return processes with operationally relevant benchmarks for achieving these standards**
- **Expand the standard of physical safety to address all widespread threat to life and physical integrity of a person, including threats that stem from generalized violence and disasters**
- **Detail standards for ensuring the dignity of refugees is safeguarded in returns processes, and their agency in decision-making around returns is respected.**

The end goal of return is not simply to arrive back into the country of origin, but to achieve effective sustainable reintegration into the community and location of choice within that country. Voluntary repatriations processes must be underscored by bilateral, regional, and/or national frameworks that ensure refugee protection. We appreciate the concept note's suggestion to reinforce Tripartite Agreements with a 'support group'

- **The Global Compact should expand on the model of using tripartite agreements to ensure the involvement of a larger set of States in such agreements, as well as broader targets for solutions to be set within the agreements. We would hope such a support group would support these goals.**

Finally, there are two inherent risks for refugees returning to situations of active conflict with significant internal displacement. First, conditions contributing to widespread internal displacement are also likely to result in a risk of secondary internal displacement of the returning refugee or effectively leave returning refugees in a de facto situation of internally displacement. Finally, there is a risk that the drivers of displacement – whether conflict or disaster – could be amplified by a large influx of returnees.<sup>1</sup>

**To safeguard the sustainability of returns, the Global Compact on Refugees should:**

- **Define international responsibilities for return sustainability in concrete and actionable terms. This should include greater clarity on the role for the international community in supporting and monitoring the sustainability of returns.**
- **Ensure States of origin to integrate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into national law and policy.**

A longer version of this statement will be submitted in writing

Thank you chair.

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<sup>1</sup> Add citation from final version of "The Invisible Majority: IDPs on the Displacement Continuum"