
IFRC Policy Brief: **Global Compact on Refugees**

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IFRC Position on the Global Compact on Refugees

The IFRC welcomes the commitments expressed by UN Member States in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants to respect and protect the safety, dignity and rights of migrants and refugees. As such, the IFRC views the Global Compact on Refugees as a unique opportunity to improve the situation for refugees around the world. At the same time, we need to do better at sharing our global humanitarian responsibilities towards refugees and easing the pressure on countries that welcome and host refugees. These key messages have been specifically crafted in view of the negotiations around the Programme of Action, and we hope States will support having them reflected in the final outcome of the Global Compact on Refugees to be adopted in December 2018.

In the design of the Global Compact on Refugees, the IFRC calls on States to:

1. Adopt a more equitable and principled approach to responsibility sharing

The Global Compact on Refugees must ultimately be about greater cooperation and solidarity among States. Equitable, predictable and flexible funding will be one of the key aspects of a successful international responsibility sharing scheme.

2. Support refugees to become self-reliant

Refugees should be considered as “agents of development” rather than passive recipients of humanitarian aid. When refugees gain access to education and labor markets, they can build their skills and become self-reliant, contributing to local economies and supporting the development of the communities hosting them. Inclusion of refugees in their new home country is the most effective way to ensure positive outcomes for them and the wider community, and supporting their wish to contribute to that society.

3. Recognize and support the role of local civil society in hosting refugees and meeting their needs

States and humanitarian actors need to recognize the distinct added value of local actors as well as enhance local actor’s capacities to provide qualitative, sustainable and principled humanitarian responses.

Our work with refugees and displaced persons

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has significant experience working to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees and displaced persons across their journey, together with the communities that support them. National Societies, as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, stand ready to assist and support States to meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons.

Our approach is based on our Fundamental Principles – in particular the Principle of Humanity – which requires us to bring assistance, without discrimination, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. The IFRC has always promoted an approach based on prioritising the most urgent humanitarian needs. However, our approach is also informed by rights, and we recognize and promote the full observance of the particular rights of refugees.

1. Adopt a more equitable and principled approach to responsibility sharing

It is essential that countries of asylum are not left alone to deal with supporting refugees. The notion of “responsibility sharing” (also known as “burden sharing”) requires that more needs to be done to ensure that host countries are supported by the international community¹. States need to:

- Scale up financial contributions to ensure that refugees’ needs are adequately and holistically addressed. While we agree that sharing of responsibility goes well beyond solely providing funding, there is a need to provide further support to programmes aiming to help refugees in building sustainable, safe and dignified livelihoods.
- Increase resettlement quotas and encourage other countries — not yet engaged in resettlement programs — to start resettling refugees. Ensure that resettlement² policies determine eligibility on the basis of vulnerability assessments rather than political interests. There should be an end to the practice in some States to employ ‘integration criteria’ that favour the perceived ability of a candidate to more easily settle (for instance, excluding persons with medical requirements) rather than focusing on those most in need. Resettlement procedures should put the needs of the individual at the

National Societies support to “resettlement countries”

At least nine National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are currently the primary partner of the Government in countries where refugees are resettled, and many more National Societies provide other assistance and social inclusion support in “resettlement countries”.

National Societies working to support people arriving through the resettlement route report that - in many cases - they are able to provide substantial support, including family reunification, which is a significant factor to refugee well-being and social inclusion.

However, because National Societies work with all groups of displaced persons, they are often keenly aware of the different levels of support for refugees who have been granted asylum through different routes, and the risk of vulnerability and even destitution for some refugees who arrive through the asylum system.

Similarly, for complementary measures to be effective, the level of support should be comparable to established measures such as resettlement.

1. “Burden-sharing” was first used to refer to the need for sharing responsibility for protection of refugees in situations of mass influx. The preamble to the United Nation’s 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states that granting asylum “may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries,” implying the need for “international cooperation.” Since then, this has been interpreted as requiring two main sorts of action. The first has been providing financial assistance for countries of asylum — usually less-developed states — to help them with the care and maintenance of refugees, mainly through funding the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in countries of asylum. The second type of action has involved what might be termed “physical” as opposed to financial burden-sharing: i.e., the dispersal of refugees among states. This type of “resettlement” approach was adopted to deal with the refugee crisis triggered by the Hungarian uprising in 1956, those fleeing Chile after the Pinochet coup in 1973, or schemes for resettlement of Vietnamese refugees from 1979 onwards. Since its adoption in the 1950s, there have been several attempts to replace it with more euphemistic notions of “solidarity” or “balance of efforts.” As far as the IFRC is concerned, we refer to “responsibility sharing”, a more neutral and positive notion.

2. Resettlement is one of the three durable solutions for refugees identified by UNHCR, along with local integration and voluntary repatriation. It involves the selection and transfer of recognised refugees (only recognised refugees are eligible for resettlement) from one State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them as refugees and provide them with permanent residence status. Where local integration is not an option and voluntary repatriation is not regarded as being imminently viable or feasible, resettlement may be the only durable solution available especially in the case of particular acute protection needs. Resettlement is considered an expression of international solidarity that allows States to share responsibility for refugee protection by reducing strain on resources, political stability and security problems affecting the first countries of asylum. In 2015, 107,100 refugees were admitted for resettlement, but the number remains low compared to the need for resettlement places (0.4% of the total number of recognised refugees). Moreover, only a few countries currently accept refugees for resettlement, with the US admitting 60% of the total number of refugees resettled in 2015. It is thus important to increase the number of resettlement places as well as the number of countries involved.

centre, and resettle individuals in countries and contexts which are most conducive to their future well-being.³

- Provide funds to support successful regional initiatives such as the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and reintegration of returnees in Somalia.
- Facilitate the arrival of refugees through their consular presence, simplified procedures, and effective access to embassies in third countries.
- Provide more complementary pathways for refugees to enter, including through family reunification; leveraging private and community sponsorship; increasing access to educational opportunities in third countries; facilitating labour mobility schemes; and ensure data collection on and overall monitoring of complementary pathways for admission.

2. Support refugees to become self-reliant

The idea that refugees should be included in communities from the very beginning, including access to livelihood opportunities, is at the heart of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). This was recognized in the New York Declaration, when Member States stated that refugee camps “*should be the exception,*” and a temporary measure in case of emergency.

Based on the experiences of our National Societies that are engaged in social inclusion programmes at the local and national level, the IFRC strongly endorses UNHCR’s statement that “*when refugees gain access to education and labour markets, they can build their skills and become self-reliant, contributing to local economies and fuelling the development of the communities hosting them*”.

Refugees should be considered as “*agents of development*” rather than passive recipients of humanitarian aid. When refugees gain access to education and labor markets, they can build their skills and become self-reliant, contributing to local economies and supporting the development of the communities hosting them.

We see social inclusion of refugees as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation and respect. Social inclusion and integration efforts should accordingly focus on support for refugees to adapt to a new home, as well as dialogue with and support to host communities to become inclusive and welcoming societies.

At the same time, there are concerns regarding the risks of tensions with local communities. In many countries, refugees face suspicion,

3. There should be a positive application of integration criteria, taking into consideration language ability, closeness to family, cultural similarity, diaspora community as positive aspects, as long as people are not excluded based on urgent needs. Many hosting countries make the point that if people are resettled in a country with no community links, no understanding of the country, the integration process has greater chances of failing and refugees will leave.

hostility and xenophobia. Multiple strategies are needed to address this. Integration and awareness raising efforts are needed to establish a process of mutual understanding and respect between communities. Facilitation of connection and understanding between communities is essential to counter xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination so that refugees are seen as positive contributors.

Equally, it is important to address deeper domestic structural inequalities that create a breeding ground for tensions. International assistance to refugees must benefit host communities as well as refugees, and particularly marginalized groups within them. Local populations should have access to the same level of services, and any perceptions of unfair treatment needs to be addressed.

States need to:

- Support the self-reliance of refugees, through access to language skills and employment opportunities, and recognize the contributions that refugees make. This would include facilitating the possibility for refugees and asylum seekers to volunteer, as well as to support their integration while looking for employment.
- Adopt a comprehensive approach to social inclusion. As clearly set-out by the CRRF provisions, inclusion programmes are most successful when working across all sectors within the government (employment, housing, education, social welfare, judiciary, etc.) and in collaboration with local community groups and associations. When refugees have appropriate access to resources, opportunities and rights, they can thrive as active citizens in their new home.
- Promote all refugees' self reliance and ensure that social inclusion programmes are appropriate to the specific needs of the individual. Differentiated measures should be taken to ensure adapted and appropriate measures of social inclusion of marginalised groups among refugees, such as children, women, persons with disabilities and elderly persons.
- Ensure that social inclusion programmes are equitable. In some countries, "resettled" or "quota" refugees have access to extensive and comprehensive inclusion services upon arrival (e.g., housing, language training, orientation, educational support, access to the labour market) whereas asylum seekers and refugees through other routes have comparatively limited access to such services, and the burden of finding work and housing is placed on them.
- Ensure that vulnerable members of the host population also have access to the same assistance provided to refugee populations, based on a thorough needs assessment. Such inclusion programmes should be seen as an investment in the communities' future and States and civil society should work together to cultivate this understanding in the community.

Collaboration between IFRC and UNHCR

The IFRC and the UNHCR enjoy a long standing collaboration. In 1957, UNHCR awarded the IFRC, then known as the League of Red Cross Societies, the Nansen Refugee Award in 1957 for its invaluable help in responding to the needs of Hungarian refugees.

The partners have signed several agreements, including a 2002 Memorandum of Understanding. It also covers the first aid training which Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies provide to UNHCR staff.

Under the humanitarian community's cluster approach to humanitarian crises, the IFRC and the UNHCR co-chair the emergency shelter cluster. Staff and volunteers of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, meanwhile, often support displaced populations.

They provide food, water, relief items, health care and psychosocial support to vulnerable people in UNHCR-run camps. IFRC and UNHCR are working together, in close partnership, in more than 35 refugee operations, including Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya.

3. Recognize and promote the role of civil society and communities in support for refugees

Local actors — Governments, communities, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and local civil society — have a distinct added value in a refugee response. In any humanitarian emergency, local actors are fast because they are close. Local actors often have access that no international actor can achieve and have a strong understanding of local circumstances, politics and culture. Importantly, local actors are still there working with refugee and host communities, long after the international actors have left.

National Societies providing support at the community level in CRRF roll out countries.

Uganda

“Every day we see refugee families arriving at the border hungry, scared, sick and weak,” observes Irene Nakasitta of the Uganda Red Cross Society, which is stationed at border points to register new arrivals and ensure their safe transport to reception centres where the Red Cross provides additional screening, shelter and assistance.

From the reception centres, Red Cross teams accompany refugees to the settlements in northern Uganda. In addition to water treatment, sanitation and hygiene promotion, Uganda Red Cross teams also deliver first aid, first aid training and other health services at the settlements, as well as food, household items, psychosocial care, and a range of assistance and protection activities for unaccompanied children, including family tracing and reunification.

Kenya

In Kenya, the National Society supports refugees in the Dabaab camps with activities to promote active citizenship and inclusion in the wider society through education, vocational trainings, livelihoods activities and support for mental and physical well-being. Kenya Red Cross also provides extensive health care support with a fully-functional referral hospital.

However, we also know that international actors can either promote and enhance the capacities of local actors to provide a quality, sustainable and principled response, or can undermine this capacity. This happens when we treat local organizations as sub-contractors instead of partners, failing to invest in their capacity, but simply seek the cheapest service, often requiring them to subsidize operations. It is essential that we focus on supporting the long term institutional capacities of local and national actors. We need to invest in advance of refugee crises in the capacities of local actors, to ensure that they are ready and able to respond and are not overwhelmed by a sudden influx of emergency relief funds.

States need to:

- Invest in capacity strengthening for local actors. Such work should be led by local and national actors themselves, defining what they need and how. Provision of core funding is essential, as is support for financial management, domestic resource mobilization, project management, accountability and reporting, and good governance, not just technical expertise linked to specific projects.
- Support community led social inclusion initiatives. Inclusion is also about building connections between people, and between communities. States should seek out and support such community-level initiatives, while at the same time challenging negative, hateful and false information about refugees in the media and public life that seek to counteract such initiatives, including prosecuting hateful acts which contravene national legislation.
- Support the adoption of inclusive frameworks to maximize refugees’ potential for social and economic contributions, for example in terms of urban settlement and access to labour markets.

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.