

MERCY CORPS COMMENTS ON DRAFT ONE OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

March 2018

Mercy Corps is a global humanitarian organization empowering people to recover from crisis, build better lives and transform their communities for good. We welcome the first draft of the Global Compact on Refugees. In this note, Mercy Corps provides feedback on the first draft and offers suggestions for strengthening future drafts.

Refugee rights and responsibility-sharing

We appreciate that the first draft now makes reference to the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as regional refugee instruments in the main text, and that it explicitly mentions the principle of non-*refoulement* (paras. 2-4). We also welcome the greater detail on mechanisms for burden-and responsibility-sharing (paras. 13-42). We invite further detail on how these mechanisms will function, and we call for a specific commitment to ensuring that young refugees and youth-led organisations can meaningfully participate in these mechanisms.¹

Addressing root causes

Mercy Corps strongly welcomes the inclusion of new introductory paragraphs on prevention and addressing root causes of displacement (paras. 8-9). It is imperative to work to prevent conflict given that 80% of today's humanitarian assistance is spent responding to conflict-related displacement. If the international community is to address the global displacement crisis seriously, we must make bigger, smarter, and more sustained investments in grassroots peacebuilding and in high-level diplomatic efforts to broker peace agreements.²

¹ In line with Goal 3 of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action (2016), available at <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3829> [hereinafter "Youth Compact"].

² Mercy Corps, *An Ounce of Prevention: Why increasing investment in conflict prevention is worth more than a "pound of cure" in addressing the displacement crisis* (September 2016), available at https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Mercy%20Corps_An%20Ounce%20of%20Prevention_0.pdf. See also United Nations & World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (2018).

Using cash and markets to promote self-reliance and resilience

We appreciate that the first draft recognizes some of the benefits of providing cash assistance (para. 57). We recommend that the next draft specifically note that responsibly distributing cash instead of commodities where appropriate can support refugee independence and stimulate host community markets and economic opportunities. We would also like to see the Compact commit States to moving as quickly as possible to interventions that increase refugee access to market information and livelihoods.³

Recognizing the needs, rights, and capabilities of young refugees

Mercy Corps has called for the Compact to recognize the specific needs and potential of young refugees ages 10 to 24.⁴ We appreciate that the Compact currently acknowledges, in several instances, the specific needs and capabilities of young people in comprehensive refugee responses. With stronger and more specific language on young people, however, the Compact could be a more powerful tool to protect young refugees and build on their potential. The Compact should draw from, and make explicit reference to, existing standards on young people in crisis, including the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action (2016) and the October 2016 Conclusion on Youth of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme.

Ensuring real partnership: We are pleased to see the Compact acknowledges that youth should be included in decision-making processes during refugee responses, drawing on the Global Youth Advisory Council as a model of youth participation (para. 31). We also strongly welcome the Compact's recognition

³ The Collaborative Cash Delivery Platform, Statement by the CCD on the Zero Draft of the Global Compact on Refugees (February 2018), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/events/conferences/5a9921047/statement-collaborative-cash-delivery-platform-zero-draft-global-compact.html>.

⁴ Mercy Corps, *Young People in the Global Compact on Refugees* (October 2017), available at <https://www.mercycorps.org/research/young-people-global-compact-refugees>.

of the important role that sports and cultural activities play for refugee youth (para. 38).

However, Mercy Corps would like to see a stronger commitment throughout the Compact to ensuring a real partnership with young people. In outlining a multi-stakeholder approach (paras. 29-38), the Compact should explicitly commit States and relevant stakeholders *to support systematic engagement and partnership with youth in all phases of humanitarian action, especially decision-making and budget allocations.*⁵ Then, throughout Part B of the Compact, young people should be identified as active participants in designing, implementing, and monitoring any refugee response, with adolescent girls and young women specifically engaged. Young people should also be meaningfully included as partners in the global, regional, and national mechanisms supporting a comprehensive refugee response (paras. 16-26).

Disaggregated data: We welcome that the first draft commits States and relevant stakeholders to collecting, analyzing, and disseminating age- and sex- disaggregated data (paras. 40, 49, 63, 91). We would like to see the Compact clarify that this data should not only be collected, but also that it should be systematically used both to tailor programming according to age- and sex-considerations, and to track impact accordingly.⁶

Reception and admission: We are seriously concerned that the protection needs of young people are not specifically noted in the “Reception and Admission” section of the draft. We urge the drafters to specify that States and relevant partners should create safe spaces in refugee reception for adolescents and young people. The Compact should specify that young people should benefit from community-based protection networks and safe spaces established specifically for them.⁷

Promoting a greater variety of educational opportunities: We welcome that the first draft of the Compact promotes education for young refugees, including flexible learning programmes (paras. 59-60). We are concerned that a reference to time spent out of school for young people has been removed between the Zero and First Drafts of the Compact, and we would like to see youth mentioned specifically again in the final sentence of paragraph 59.

⁵ In line with Goal 2 of the Youth Compact.

⁶ In line with Goal 5 of the Youth Compact.

⁷ In line with Goal 1 of the Youth Compact, which commits partners to make humanitarian programmes contribute to the protection, health and development of young women, young men, girls and boys.

Paragraph 60 is currently a significant missed opportunity to highlight the options available for supporting the education of young refugees. We strongly encourage the inclusion of these options. Young refugees need access to quality non-formal education, and they need training that includes transferable and life skills.⁸ They also need access to health information, including reproductive health.

Addressing psycho-social trauma: We welcome the mention of the need to address psycho-social trauma within educational settings (para. 60). States should also be encouraged to promote well-being and resilience through targeted psychosocial support for young people integrated into activities for young people across all sectors, not only in educational settings. Research demonstrates the critical need to reduce prolonged stress among adolescents in order to enable higher functioning.⁹

Providing jobs and livelihoods: We strongly welcome the draft’s commitment to promoting economic opportunities for young people (para. 61). The Compact should include a specific reference to promoting young people’s access to *productive, safe and equitable* work opportunities.

Health and food security: We welcome the Compact’s commitment to facilitating access to health systems for young people (para. 62) and the first draft’s new language giving special attention to food security for adolescent girls (para. 68).

Solutions: We welcome that the Compact calls for the participation of young people in processes and decision-making relevant to repatriation, including peacebuilding activities (para. 77). In identifying local solutions (paras. 87-89), the Compact should recommend that States invest in long-term integration programmes to promote positive relationships between refugees and hosts, creating safe spaces where youth can convene to identify common priorities and develop a shared voice across ethnic groups or host-refugee community divides.

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⁸ We welcome the addition of language supporting the promotion of language and vocational training in paragraph 61.

⁹ See, e.g., Panter-Brick, C. et al., “Insecurity, distress and mental health: experimental and randomized controlled trials of a psychosocial intervention for youth affected by the Syrian crisis,” *J Child Psychol Psychiatr*. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12832 (2017).