

Measuring the impact arising from hosting, protecting and assisting refugees

2nd Workshop, April 25-26, 2019, Geneva

Summary of discussions and agreements

Background

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) has placed enhanced responsibility-sharing at the center of the international refugee protection agenda. The GCR commits stakeholders to specific measures toward that goal, including a proposal to measure and “map” their contributions¹. The overall exercise is coordinated by UNHCR with technical support from the World Bank and OECD. A progress report will be prepared for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019.

The objective is to provide data to underpin discussions among Member States that could eventually lead to a more equitable, predictable and sustainable responsibility-sharing arrangement, that is not limited to financial responsibility-sharing alone. Three elements are envisaged as part of the “measuring contributions” exercise:

- (i) A measure of contributions by “donor” countries, with a consistent methodology, led by OECD;
- (ii) A measure of contributions by “hosting” countries, with a consistent methodology;
- (iii) A metric that would measure the way contributions are distributed across Member States.

As part of the effort to measure the contributions of “hosting” countries, the second of a series of workshops was held in Geneva on 25-26 April 2019 (following the first workshop on February 12-13, 2019), facilitated by UNHCR.

Workshop Objectives

The objectives of the workshop(s), as agreed by participants from hosting countries during the February workshop, was to develop a common methodology or tool to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees. As articulated by a participant, the objective of these workshops is to come together to develop a common language and practical tool to capture different experiences and learn from them.

This objective will be achieved through a transparent, participatory process, led by hosting countries. There is need for a consensus as there is no commonly accepted, comprehensive methodology. Any methodology that is adopted will rest on a set of assumptions and agreed approaches, is likely to use proxies, omit some aspects, and rely on incomplete data sets.

The workshops will define a homogeneous approach across countries using existing data sources where possible. The approach and methodology will be iterated, reviewed and improved over time.

At the end of the first workshop, there was agreement that although complex, the exercise of assessing the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees was feasible. There was a recognition that a wide variety of sectors and areas of impact would need to be assessed, and that some areas may be easier to address while others may require more complex analyses. In particular, the measurement of impacts on jobs, prices and poverty, for instance, may be quite complicated, as well as the measurement of long-term capital investment needs.

¹ Global Compact on Refugees – paragraph 48.

It was agreed that the second workshop focus on service delivery sectors such as health and education with the World Bank team preparing some methodological options for discussion. The principles to be kept in mind were that any methodology be simple and transparent, and to the extent possible, rely on readily available data sources, with the objective of delivering an output for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019.

Summary of discussions

The second workshop was enriched by a broader representation from refugee-hosting member states. With the participation of new members, the workshop began with a summary of discussions and agreements from the first event (described above) and a candid, constructive discussion around participants' hopes, fears and desired outcomes from this process. The latter discussions echoed the concerns and expectations from the first workshop, while recognizing that a broader participation bodes well for the success of this effort.

The discussions on the afternoon of Day 1 focused around two alternative approaches presented by the World Bank in its advisory role for consideration. These aimed at estimating the fiscal costs of refugee needs related to delivery of services such as health and education, and potentially, water, electricity and sanitation and social safety nets. The team presented two approaches: (i) the average or per capita cost approach; and (ii) the detailed or needs-based cost approach. Both are anchored on national systems delivering services. The former relies on availability of budget data and, is relatively simple, but may not be able to take into account the additional needs of refugees. The latter approach requires information from a detailed needs assessment to estimate the additional costs above and beyond what national systems bear for host country populations. The presentation of the two approaches sparked a rich, renewed discussion on the objectives of the entire exercise. Several member states reiterated the commitment to measure the impacts of refugee hosting; other participants raised the importance of accounting for both costs and benefits.

Therefore, Day 2 began with a presentation of the different elements that could be included in a full assessment of impacts. These include, not only fiscal costs, which was the focus of the methodological approaches, but also capital investment costs, impact assessments of refugees on host communities' labor, housing and other markets, environmental costs, as well as assessments of social cohesion and security risks. This presentation included a discussion of the data requirements, and timelines for such a comprehensive assessment, and a presentation of the standard norms for measuring impact, the establishment of a counterfactual, and an empirical strategy to attribute cause and effect. The following discussion among participants focused on defining a mutually agreed and feasible strategy that would provide a constructive basis for discussions on better responsibility sharing at the GRF, the ultimate objective of a comprehensive assessment of impact as established in the GCR.

Summary of agreements

Based on these discussions, there was an agreement to initiate work on parallel tracks, with different purposes and timelines:

- (i) To start informing discussions on how to improve financing the global public good, Member States would review fiscal costs and revenues for different sectors, following the per capita or average cost approach, identify available data, and on that basis, reconvene in September 2019 to discuss the possible implications of the findings, and agree on a communications strategy for the December GRF.

- (ii) To start accounting for unmet needs and help enhance the allocation and channeling of resources, Member States would explore the use of the same methodological approach to assess what it would take to fully cover refugee populations in national systems. The findings would be discussed in September, with careful consideration of implications and discussions on communicating the findings.
- (iii) To start informing policy discussions at a country level, a subset of volunteer refugee-hosting states could decide to launch detailed impact assessments, which would likely be a multi-year effort.

To facilitate these efforts, UNHCR (with support by the World Bank) will share a document describing the proposed average cost approach, including a template with data requirements, to estimate fiscal costs for education, health, water, sanitation, energy, social transfers and subsidies, direct contributions and refugee-specific costs including registration and administration. This document will suggest key counterparts and data sources. With participants and country-level counterparts creating the appropriate authorizing environment, UNHCR and the World Bank could reach out through their country teams to work with in-country technical specialists to identify data and populate the template as may be appropriate. These could then form the basis for discussions around measuring current fiscal contributions and unmet needs, for the next workshop, scheduled for September 2019. A brief stocktaking exercise is planned for the week of June 10, 2019.

ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ANNEX 2: WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS