

IFRC POLICY BRIEF

Making the Global Compact on Refugees a reality: Ensuring protection and inclusion at the local level

Refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq arrive by bus to the Serbian / Croatian border from Macedonia and Belgrade. Red Cross distribute food, water, clothes, shoes and other necessities / October 2015

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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, being embedded in local communities 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

In 2016 UN Member States across the world adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, containing a new Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), and setting in motion the process towards the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in December 2018.

As a global humanitarian network with a presence in 191 countries, the IFRC welcomes the commitments expressed in the GCR. The GCR builds on best practices and contains an ambitious vision: one where the global responsibility of responding to refugee situations is more equitably divided between States and where durable solutions are supported. Where diverse actors – including refugees themselves and the communities which host them – work together in complementary roles to ensure that refugees are safe, better supported, and able to live dignified lives.

It is crucial that States and other stakeholders across the world commit to concrete action capable of turning these global level aspirations into meaningful impact at the national and local levels. Ultimately, the benchmark of success for the GCR will be its ability to catalyse meaningful change in the lives of refugees and the communities which host them. All actors have a role to play in this and the IFRC and its member National Societies stand ready to provide support, in line with our Fundamental Principles. We appreciate the recognition in GCR paragraph 3 of the key role that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (including National Societies), plays in implementing the GCR, as part of a multi-stakeholder approach.

The IFRC recommends commitment and collective action in the following four areas:

1. **Don't forget the basics: Save lives and meet basic needs**
2. **Engage and support refugees' self-reliance and contributions**
3. **Share responsibility to invest in making the GCR work**
4. **Support the role and capacities of refugees and local humanitarian actors in implementing the GCR and in service delivery**

1. Don't forget the basics: Save lives and meet basic needs¹

Alongside much-needed ambition and innovation, implementation of the GCR should not forget the basics. Every day Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies bear witness to cases where refugees (as well as other migrants) experience unacceptable risks during their journeys to safety and in host countries, and where refugees are left unable to meet their basic needs.

¹ In the context of mixed flows, there are also relevant commitments in this area throughout the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), including Objectives 7 (Address and reduce vulnerabilities in Migration), 8 (Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants) and 15 (Provide access to basic services for migrants).

The GCR is firmly rooted in the international refugee protection regime (including the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol), as well as relevant international human rights instruments, international humanitarian law, humanitarian principles and other relevant frameworks. Implementation of the GCR should start from a baseline of demonstrating commitment to these frameworks, ensuring that refugees – and the communities that host them – are able to live safely, in dignity and peace, with support for basic needs.

In particular, the IFRC calls on States to:

- Make saving lives a top priority, including by ensuring that border management policies do not put refugees' or other migrants' lives at risk and that lifesaving activities are never criminalized;
- Ensure full respect for the principle of *non-refoulement*;
- Ensure that national laws and policies support refugees' effective access to essential services, including food, shelter, health care, access to justice, psychosocial support, information about relevant rights, entitlements and processes in host countries, and support in restoring family links.²
- Protect refugees' right to family unity, including through protection from family separation, for example at borders;
- Ensure refugees' timely access to efficient and effective asylum systems.

2. Support refugees' self-reliance'

Refugees are often eager to support themselves, other refugees, and to contribute to host societies. However, in many instances they face significant barriers. Action is needed to remove barriers and enable refugees' self-reliance, facilitating their contributions to host societies.

The GCR reiterates the role of local integration as one of three durable solutions, also stating the importance that 'pending the availability of durable solutions, programmes and projects...[are] designed in ways that combat all forms of discrimination and promote peaceful coexistence between refugee and host communities, in line with national policies.' Supporting social cohesion between refugees and host societies is crucial, and should be part of a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation and respect.

² As best practice reflected in the GCR, wherever possible refugees should be supported to access essential services as part of strengthened national frameworks. However, where this is not the case, additional provision of humanitarian assistance may be the only or most appropriate option to ensure refugees are able to meet their basic needs. Humanitarian assistance must never be criminalized and humanitarian actors must be able to provide essential services and life-saving support to those in need. Refugees must be able to access such assistance safely and without fear.

How we will contribute

IFRC and National Societies will continue to provide essential services to refugees and asylum seekers around the world. We will seek to scale up these services in collaboration with governments, partner organisations or independently, where we have the capacity and expertise to do so, and at all times in close consultation and collaboration with affected communities. We will promote increased access to assistance and protection through humanitarian diplomacy and programmatic interventions, seeking to understand and address formal and informal barriers to accessing services, including by engaging refugees, asylum seekers and host communities in service provision and seeking their feedback on these services.

How we will contribute

Throughout our work, IFRC and National Societies will recognise and empower refugees as active agents of development. We will work to ensure that refugees are supported to play an active role in and contribute to host communities, including through equal access to resources and opportunities, in particular employment, education, language training, training, housing and participation in civil society. We will encourage and facilitate volunteering – and where possible employment opportunities – for refugees (of all ages, abilities and genders) within Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to support a sense of purpose, contribution, engagement and belonging, and encourage integration within host communities. We will work with refugees and host societies to support the development of personal relationships between refugees and members of the host society, to develop mutual understanding and respect, and a sense of acceptance, belonging and participation.



For the estimated one million people living in camps in Bangladesh after fleeing violence in the state of Rakhine, Myanmar, life can be challenging and difficult. Understanding this, Bangladesh Red Crescent volunteers continue to organize opportunities and safe spaces for children to play and learn.

How we will contribute

IFRC and National Societies will continue to work with governments who facilitate third-country solutions, including through resettlement programmes and complementary pathways. In particular, providing assistance and support to support refugees' integration within host communities in third countries.

In particular, we call on states to:

- Support measures to enhance refugees' self-reliance, in line with Objective (ii) of the GCR, in particular promoting access to decent work and education;
- Support efficient mechanisms to pursue alternatives to camps where relevant (GCR Para 54).
- Make funding available for targeted programmes aimed at reducing tensions between refugee and host communities, fostering respect, intercultural awareness and understanding, as well as combatting discrimination (GCR Para 84).

3. Share responsibility to invest in making the GCR work

Today, almost 4 in 5 refugees are hosted in countries neighbouring their countries of origin. These countries are often left by the rest of the international community to bear the vast proportion of responsibility for responding to refugee crises.³ The GCR puts forward a number of different mechanisms to support more effective responsibility-sharing in response to refugee situations. This includes the Global Refugee Forum, national level arrangements to coordinate stakeholders and facilitate comprehensive responses, support platforms for specific crises, regional/sub regional mechanisms, as well as relevant objectives towards easing pressures on host countries and facilitating third country solutions.

These proposals have promise, but now is the time to invest in making them work. Concrete action is needed to make commitments a reality. In particular, states can show support for responsibility-sharing by:

- Committing to the Global Refugee Forum, ensuring States are represented at the Forum at senior levels and prepared to make concrete and tangible pledges;
- Making ambitious funding commitments in support of host countries, in line with areas in need of support outlined in the GCR. Funding commitments should be new, rather than repackaging existing commitments;
- Considering responsibility-sharing beyond financial commitments, including through political leadership and galvanising support around specific crises or issue areas;
- Commitment to third country solutions, including through ambitious resettlement commitments, as well as efforts to ensure scaled up and effective access complementary pathways to protection, in line with UNHCR's Three Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. This should include improving the accessibility of family reunification procedures, in support of the right to family unity.

³ <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/>

4. Support the role of refugees themselves and local humanitarian actors

The GCR puts forward a vision for a multi-stakeholder approach which includes both refugees themselves and local humanitarian actors as a central part of the picture. The central role of refugees and local actors must continue to be recognised as the GCR is implemented, and should be considered a central way of responding to refugee crises as part of a multi-stakeholder system given their central role.

All stakeholders should ensure an inclusive approach to funding, co-ordination, strategic discussions and operational plans developed in line with the GCR, ensuring that the role of refugees and local actors is recognised and that meaningful space is created for their engagement.

In particular, we call on States and all relevant stakeholders to:

- Ensure that – as standard practice – refugees and local actors are supported to engage actively and play a lead role in all mechanisms linked to implementation of the GCR, including the Global Refugee Forum;
- Ensure that refugees themselves play a key role in the development of national and local level policy development impacting them, including discussions linked to solutions;
- Promote and grow the capacity of local civil society actors to deliver relevant assistance and services to refugees, including through investment in capacity strengthening, shared decision-making, and equitable partnerships, in line with commitments under the Grand Bargain;
- Formalise the role of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in responding to refugee situations, as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, through national level support plans and frameworks, including those linked to the CRRF and/or GCR implementation.

How we will contribute

IFRC and National Societies throughout our network will continue to support the local capacities of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies as key local actors, and to promote wider policy change in support of the capacities of all local humanitarian actors, including those that are refugee or host community led. We will continue to include refugee and host community staff and volunteers in teams working with refugee communities.



As one of the most generous countries in Europe, Sweden is home to many newly-resettled-refugees and asylum seekers. Among them are affected by torture, armed conflict and dangerous migration. The Swedish Red Cross opened its first treatment center for this particular group for more than 30 years ago. Since then, tens of thousands of people who fled the conflict, oppression and persecution have got treatment and care.

A few examples of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies support for refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and other displaced persons across the world.



A Bangladesh Red Crescent Society provides support to over 250,000 displaced people and host communities in Cox's Bazar, including shelter, basic food and NFIs, WASH, health care and psychosocial support, livelihoods, Disaster Risk Reduction and protection.

B Australian Red Cross support to refugees and asylum seekers includes independent monitoring of the conditions of detention; settlement support (housing and orientation) and programmes to increase economic participation of asylum seekers and refugees.

C New Zealand Red Cross is the primary provider of community refugee settlement programmes in New Zealand, supporting former refugees, their families and communities, including through employment support, Trauma Recovery and Restoring Family Links (RFL).

D The Korean Red Cross provides emergency support to refugees in South Korea to support refugees with livelihoods and also supports the Refugee Resettlement Project, which is led by the South Korean Ministry of Justice.

E Ethiopian Red Cross Society supports Restoring Family Links (RFL) services in refugee camps.

F Kenya Red Cross Society provides health and RFL services in Kalobeyei, Kakuma and Dadaab camps as well as RFL for refugees in Nairobi.

G Sudanese Red Crescent provides psychosocial support to refugees in reception centres and refugee camps, as well as RFL.

H Uganda Red Cross Society provides WASH and health care services in and undertakes protection, gender and inclusion programmes and RFL services in camps hosting Congolese and South Sudanese Refugees.

I The national societies of **Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador** have created humanitarian service points where asylum seekers and other migrants can obtain health care, psychosocial services, shelter etc.

J Colombia Red Cross support Colombian who have returned following the peace agreements.

K Venezuela Red Cross supports people displaced people from Colombia by the conflict.

L The Canadian Red Cross Society provides asylum seekers with information about emergency shelter, social services, legal and health services; language classes, work permits and a 24/7 telephone hotline.

O Danish Red Cross provides reception, accommodation, health, education, Mental Health and Psychosocial support and vocational training to asylum seekers, visits to immigration detention and support to integration for refugees.

P Red Cross of Montenegro provides protection support to asylum seekers, including information and access to registration processes and other services.

Q Turkish Red Crescent Society cash-based assistance programmes for Syrian refugees (Kizilaykart)

M The Hungarian Red Cross is providing assistance (food and NFIs, first aid, psychosocial support etc.) to asylum seekers in the transit zones at the Serbian-Hungarian border.

N The British Red Cross provides refugee services in 58 towns and cities across the country, including meeting urgent needs, supporting with access to basic services, emotional support and reuniting family.

Bihac, Una-Sana Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 2019. Although she's been volunteering for more than 30 years, 70-year-old Senka Vuković is not yet tired of it. On the contrary, this retired teacher is full of life, very active and has a lot to offer to people around her. "Volunteering is my lifestyle. Through it, I've experienced many happy as well as many sad moments and I'm grateful for all of them", says Senka. Because of the Yugoslav Wars, she deeply understands people who are forced to leave their homes today. Together with her colleagues from the Red Cross of Bihac City in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Senka has spent the last 18 months helping migrants in Una-Sana Canton, especially those who are separated from their families. "I understand how difficult it is for them and I try to help them to get in touch with their families. I talk with them, listen what they're saying and sometimes all they need is to be heard," she says.



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