

# Global Compact on Refugees

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## BRIEF SUBMITTED TO THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION (CIMM)

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The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was adopted in September 2016 and set in motion the process to develop two compacts: one on refugees and one on safe, orderly and regular migration. Each pursue different objectives. For the purpose of the study being conducted by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM) on the global compacts, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Canada submits a written brief to support the committee's discussions on the global compact on refugees which UNHCR, as the UN Agency mandated by Member States to protect and find solutions for refugees globally, was given the task to elaborate.

### BACKGROUND

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The global compact on refugees was forged during 24 months of consultations with UN Member States, experts, civil society organizations (both national and international) and refugees themselves, as well as having the benefit of the practical application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) set out in the New York Declaration being piloted in a number of refugee situations. UNHCR presented to the General Assembly the compact in conjunction with its annual resolution pertaining to the work of the Office. On 13 November 2018, the resolution was approved by an overwhelming majority by the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural (Third) Committee of the UN General Assembly and sent to the General Assembly plenary for adoption by consensus before the end of the year.

Canada was actively involved in the drafting of the compact. With input from Canadian NGOs, Canada was one of the first countries to offer concrete suggestions on the issues that the compact should address. These included topics such as the benefits of refugees' economic inclusion, the imperative of increasing political and financial support for frontline hosting countries, ways to increase pathways to durable solutions in third countries, and the specific vulnerabilities facing refugee women and girls. As the Chair of UNHCR's Executive Committee in 2017, Canada took an active role in convening partners on several issues related to gender and education.

About 60 per cent of the world's refugee population live in approximately 10 countries. All in the global south. Furthermore, refugees often live in the poorest parts of these countries, side by side with host communities that often experience the same difficulties in having access to basic services. The global compact on refugees is a response to the recognition of the need to have more predictability and fairer sharing of responsibilities, including in terms of financial support and the provision of durable solutions, vis-à-vis countries hosting large numbers of refugees. The compact clearly supports approaches that deliver results for both refugees and communities that host them. In line with the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit's commitment to bridge the gap between development and humanitarian responses, it also recognizes the importance of having the participation of non-humanitarian actors, such as the international and regional financial institutions, the private sector,

faith-based organizations, cities and decentralized public institutions, as well as development actors, since the onset of an emergency.

Building on the CCRF, the global compact on refugees consolidates practices acquired over many years, and in some cases over decades, and puts forward a new vision of how the international community will engage with countries that are particularly affected by refugees.

## OBJECTIVES

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The global compact on refugees translates the idea of responsibility- and burden-sharing into practical and concrete measures. It covers the whole refugee journey – from reception to durable solutions. The compact represents the political will and ambition of the international community as a whole for strengthened cooperation and solidarity with refugees and communities hosting them.

The compact sets out a way forward to ensure host communities get the timely support they need, that refugees are better included (with access to health, education and livelihood opportunities in particular) so that they can lead productive lives, and that solutions to their plight are sought from the outset. The global compact on refugees will help make responses more systematic and predictable, and will galvanize action and resources by a broader range of local and international actors.

The four overarching objectives of the compact are to:

**1) Ease pressure on countries and communities that welcome and host refugees.**

Providing basic services for refugees, such as shelter, potable water, food, as well as access to schools and health services, is a major endeavour for countries that are, due to their geographic proximity to crises, hosting large numbers of refugees. Creating or strengthening existing public services to respond to the pressures from a refugee influx, while upholding quality services for the host population, means additional financial investments. Recognising the costs associated with such responses, the compact calls for greater predictability and burden-sharing between Member States so that frontline countries are adequately supported to provide services to both refugees and host communities. It also calls on actors such as the World Bank and regional development banks to provide, when relevant, concessional and other financing for low-income countries hosting large numbers of refugees with appropriate protection frameworks in place.

**2) Build self-reliance of refugees.**

Several States are adopting new refugee laws and regulations guaranteeing the rights of refugees and expanding refugees' access to national systems and services but also allowing them to access livelihood opportunities so that refugees do not entirely depend on external aid for their survival. Out-of-camp policies allow refugees to better integrate in the communities that temporarily welcome them until a durable solution is found. Dedicating resources to enable refugees to become self-reliant also supports the economic development of these communities. Refugees' ability to participate in their local society and economy is an important aspect of restoring their dignity and helps them positively contribute to their host communities.

**3) Expand access to third countries solutions for refugees through resettlement and other pathways of admission.**

A growing number of countries are taking part in resettlement programmes, with 35 countries now offering spaces for refugees identified as critically vulnerable who cannot remain in the country in which they first found asylum. New pathways are being explored that seek to provide additional opportunities for refugees to find durable solutions in third countries, be it through private and community sponsorship programmes, scholarships and other educational opportunities or labour mobility/economic migration schemes. Not only do these solutions help individual refugees and their families, but they also demonstrate solidarity with frontline countries and hosting communities by alleviating some of the demographic pressures. Notably, refugees who find a solution in a third country contribute meaningfully to the societies that welcome them, be it economically or socio-culturally, and benefit countries facing demographic and labour shortages.

#### **4) Foster conditions that enable refugees voluntarily to return to their home countries.**

The solution for most refugees lies with their return home in safety and dignity. This is what the overwhelming majority of refugees want. The compact recognises that continued efforts must be made to prepare the conditions for return: from restoring peace and justice to rehabilitating public services to ensure that returnees are able to reintegrate within their own societies, including through access to decent livelihoods opportunities and recognition of their human rights.

#### [A LINK TO THE COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION](#)

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From the onset, although separate, both consultation processes seek to ensure that the two compacts complement each other on issues relevant to both, such as addressing xenophobia and intolerance, trafficking and smuggling, rescue at sea, and data collection and analysis. Better managed migration contributes to a conducive environment for the effective implementation of asylum regimes. At the same time, greater international solidarity and more comprehensive responses to refugee flows encourages a tolerant and more receptive environment for people on the move.

#### [THE GCR AND THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION](#)

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The compact builds upon and reaffirms the existing international protection regime – the Refugee Convention, regional refugee treaties, and other human rights instruments, etc. – which are explicitly referred to in the text.

Nothing in the compact creates new legal obligations, nor does it modify UNHCR’s mandate. Instead, it is a non-legally binding text that builds on past best practices and charts a new way forward.

The 1951 Refugee Convention focuses on rights of refugees and obligations of States, as well as refers to international cooperation. The compact elaborates what form this international cooperation should take especially with respect to better sharing the burden and responsibility amongst Member States to reflect that frontline countries have been bearing a disproportionate responsibility in the past.

#### [A FOCUS ON REFUGEES](#)

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The refugee compact relates to refugees – who by definition are outside their country of origin. It is not designed to address all issues of forced displacement, although the New York Declaration includes commitments to address the root causes of forcible displacement and action on that front will help to

address the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well. Additionally, the compact recognizes the importance of not returning refugees to situations where they may be forcibly displaced within their own countries. In line with the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, UNHCR is working closely with national, regional and global partners to enhance protection of IDPs and contribute to preventing and resolving internal displacement.

### A POLITICAL COMMITMENT

The Compact, while not legally binding, represents the ambition of the international community to respond better to large movements of refugees. It includes a series of built-in systems to monitor progress, maintain political momentum, and rally support to address refugee situations. These include a Global Refugee Forum at ministerial level every four years at which governments will report and pledge on a range of measures like funding, resettlement places, and practices to support the inclusion of refugees.

Better responsibility sharing is about ensuring host countries and communities receive better support – through development channels, private sector investment, and access to concessional finance, alongside and in addition to robust humanitarian funding – and that refugees have a chance to contribute to the societies that host them and to their own futures. It also includes stepping up efforts to support refugees to return home voluntarily in safety and dignity.

### THE COMPREHENSIVE REFUGEE RESPONSE FRAMEWORK (CRRF)

The CRRF is a new framework to strengthen the existing system to ensure, for example, that humanitarian and development programmes are more aligned, that refugees are included in national systems (such as schools) and communities (rather than setting up parallel systems), and that hosting States get the support they need.

The CRRF brings together decades of experience in refugee situations and the latest thinking under a single new framework to be applied more systematically. It aims to ease pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance and inclusion, and provide refugees with better possibilities for solutions to their plights. More broadly, the CRRF is about making international responses to refugee situations more predictable and more widely encompassing – involving a far wider range of actors than previously.

It is already being applied in 14 countries in Africa and the Americas, both nationally and regionally, and many elements of the CRRF are being implemented in other refugee situations, as well. A fifteenth country, Afghanistan, has just begun applying the CRRF.

Lessons learned from the application of the CRRF have informed the development of the global compact on refugees. The CRRF will be an integral part of the compact, once adopted, and its application will benefit from the range of support measures set out in the compact's programme of action, as well as strong follow-up and review arrangements.

## CONCLUSION

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The global compact represents a unique opportunity to strengthen the international response to large movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations. Its success will depend on the willingness of the international community to support its implementation. The finalization of the text thus represents not the end, but rather the beginning, of an effort by the international community to work towards collective outcomes with a shared sense of direction, purpose and accountability.